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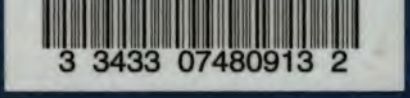
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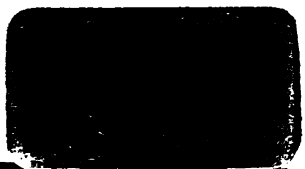

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ATHALIE

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"'Clive is a good deal of a man. . . . I never had a better companion.'"

[PAGE 242.]

ATHALIE

BY

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRANK CRAIG

NEW YORK AND LONDON
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1915

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To

My Friend

MESSMORE KENDALL

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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It was one of those early April days when birds make a great fuss over their vocal accomplishments, and the brown earth grows green over night — when the hot spring sun draws vapours from the soil, and the characteristic Long Island odour of manure is far too prevalent to please anybody but a native.

Peter Greensleeve, wandering at hazard around the corner of the tavern, came upon his business partner, Archer B. Ledlie leisurely digging for bait in the barnyard. The latter was in his shirt-sleeves — always a good sign for continued fair weather.

"Boy?" inquired Ledlie, resting one soil-incrusted boot on his spade.

"Another girl," admitted Greensleeve.

"Gawsh!" After a moment's rumination he picked up a squirming angle-worm from the edge of the shallow excavation and dropped it into the empty tomato can.

"Going fishing?" inquired Greensleeve without interest.

"I dunno. Mebbe. Your boy Jack seen a trout into Spring Pond."

Ledlie, who was a large, heavy, red-faced man with a noticeably small mouth, faded blue eyes, and grey chin whiskers, picked a budding sprig from a bush, nibbled it, and gravely seated himself on the edge of the horse-trough. He was wearing a cigar behind his ear which

"'Boy?' inquired Ledlie, resting one soil-incrusted boot on his spade."

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he presently extracted, gazed at, then reconsidering the extravagance, replaced.

"Three gals, Pete — that's your record," he remarked, gazing reproachfully out across the salt meadows beyond the causeway. "They won't bring you in nothin'," he added, shutting his thin lips.

"I kind of like them," said Greensleeve with a sigh.

"They'll eat their heads off," retorted Ledlie; "then they'll git married an' go off some'rs. There ain't nothin' to gals nohow. You oughtn't to have went an' done it."

There seemed to be no further defence for Greensleeve. Ledlie continued to chew a sprig of something green and tender, revolving it and rolling it from one side of his small, thin-lipped mouth to the other. His thin little partner brooded in the sunshine. Once he glanced up at the sign which swung in front of the road-house: "Hotel Greensleeve: Greensleeve and Ledlie, proprietors."

"Needs painting, Archie," he volunteered mildly.

"I dunno," said the other. "Since the gunnin' season closed there ain't been no business except them sports from New York. The bar done good; that's all."

"There were two commercial men Wednesday week."

"Yes, an' they found fault with their vittles. They can go to the other place next time," which was as near as Ledlie ever came to profanity.

After a silence Ledlie said: "Here come your kids, Pete. I guess I'll let 'em dig a little bait for me."

Down the road they came dancing, and across the

Greensleeve usually said what anybody told him to say.

"Walk quietly," he added; "your poor mamma's asleep."

Reluctantly the children turned toward the house, gazing inquiringly up at the curtained window of their mother's room as they trooped toward the veranda.

Jack swung around on the lower step:

"Papa!" he shouted.

"Well?"

"I forget what her name is!"

"Athalie."

CHAPTER II

HER first memories were of blue skies, green trees, sunshine, and the odour of warm moist earth.

Always through life she retained this memory of her early consciousness — a tree in pink bloom; morning-glories covering a rotting board fence; deep, rich, sun-warmed soil into which her baby fingers burrowed.

A little later commenced her memory of her mother — a still, white-shawled figure sewing under a peach tree in pink bloom.

Vast were her mother's skirts, as Athalie remembered them — a wide white tent under which she could creep out of the sunlight and hide.

Always, too, her earliest memories were crowded with children, hosts of them in a kaleidoscopic whirl around her, and their voices seemed ever in her ears.

By the age of four she had gradually understood that this vaguely pictured host of children numbered only three, and that they were her brother and two sisters — very much grown up and desirable to play with. But at seven she began to be surprised that Doris and Catharine were no older and no bigger than they were, although Jack's twelve years still awed her.

It was about this time that the child began to be aware of a difference between herself and the other

children. For a year or two it did not trouble her, nor even confuse her. She seemed to be aware of it, that was all.

When it first dawned on her that her mother was aware of it too, she could never quite remember. Once, very early in her career, her mother who had been sewing under the peach tree, dropped her work and looked down at her very steadily where she sat digging holes in the dirt.

And Athalie had a vague idea in after life that this was the beginning; because there had been a little boy sitting beside her all the while she was digging; and, somehow, she was aware that her mother could not see him.

She was not able to recollect whether her mother had spoken to her, or even whether she herself had conversed with the little boy. He never came again; of that she was positive.

When it was that her brother and sisters began to suspect her of being different she could not remember.

In the beginning she had not understood their half-incredulous curiosity concerning her; and, ardently communicative by nature, she was frank with them, confident and undisturbed, until their childlike and importunate aggressiveness, and the brutal multiplicity of their questions drove her to reticence and shyness.

For what seemed to amaze them or excite them to unbelief or to jeers seemed to her ordinary, unremarkable, and not worthy of any particular notice — not even of her own.

That she sometimes saw things "around corners," as Jack put it, had seemed natural enough to her. That, now and then, she seemed to perceive things which nobody else noticed never disturbed her even when she became aware that other people were unable to see them. To her it was as though her own eyesight were normal, and astigmatism the rule among other people.

But the blunt, merciless curiosity of other children soon taught Athalie to be on her guard. She learned that embarrassed reserve which tended toward secretiveness and untruth before she was eleven.

And in school she learned to lie, learned to deny accusations of being different, pretended that what her sisters accused her of had been merely "stories" made up to amuse them.

So, in school, she made school-life endurable for herself. Yet, always, there seemed to be *something* between her and other children that made intimacies impossible.

At the same time she was conscious of the admiration of the boys, of something about herself that they liked outside of her athletic abilities.

She had a great many friends among the boys; she could out-run, out-jump, out-swim any of them in the big country school. She was supple and trim, golden-haired and dark-eyed, and ready for anything that required enterprise and activity of mind or body. Her ragged skirts were still short at eleven — short enough not to impede her. And she led the chase for pleasure all over that part of Long Island, running wild with

the pack from hill to tide-water until every farmer in the district knew "the Greensleeve girl."

There was, of course, some deviltry among cherry trees and apple orchards — some lawlessness born of sheer exuberance and superb health — some malicious trespassing, some harrying of unpopular neighbours. But not very much, considering.

Her home life was colourless, calm, comfortable, and uneventful as she regarded it. Business at the Hotel Greensleeve had fallen off and in reality the children had very little. But children at that age who live all day in the open, require little except sympathetic intelligence for their million daily questions.

This the Greensleeve children found wanting except when their mother did her best to stimulate her own latent intelligence for their sakes.

But it rested on the foundation of an old-fashioned and limited education. Only the polite, simpler, and more maidenly arts had been taught her in the little New Jersey school her father had kept. And her education ceased when she married Greensleeve, the ex-"professor" of penmanship, a kind, gentle, unimaginative man, unusually dull even for a teacher. And he was a failure even at that.

They began married life by buying the house they were now living in; and when Greensleeve also failed as a farmer, they opened the place as a public tavern, and took in Ledlie to finance it.

So it was to her mother that Athalie went for any information that her ardent and growing intellect required. And her mother, intuitively surmising the

mind-hunger of youth, and its vigorous needs, did her limited best to satisfy it in her children. And that is really all the education they had; for what they got in the country school amounted to — well it amounted to what anybody ever gets in school.

Her most enduring, most vivid memories of her mother clustered around those summer days of her twelfth year, brief lamp-lit scenes between long, sun-lit hours of healthy, youthful madness — quiet moments when she came in flushed and panting from the headlong chase after pleasure, tired, physically satisfied, to sit on the faded carpet at her mother's feet and clasp her hands over her mother's knees.

Then "what?" and "why?" and "when?" and "how?" were the burden of the child's eager speech. Nothing seemed to have escaped her quick ears or eyes, no natural phenomena of the open; life, birth, movement, growth, the flow, and ebb of tides, thunder pealing from high-piled clouds, the sun shining through fragrant falling rain, mists that grew over swamp and meadow.

And, "Why?" she always asked.

Nothing escaped her; — swallows skimming and sheering Spring Pond, trout that jumped at sunset, the quick furry shapes of mink and muskrat, the rattling flash of a blue-winged kingfisher, a tall heron wading, a gull mewing.

Nothing escaped her: the casual caress of mating birds, procreation in farm-yard and barn-yard, fledgelings crying from a robin's nest of mud and messy

refuse, blind kittens tugging at their blinking mother.

Death, too, she saw,— a dusty heap of feathers here, a little mound of fur, there, which the idle breezes stirred under the high sky,— and once a dead dog, battered, filthy and bloody, shot by the roadside; and once some pigs being killed on a farm, all screaming.

Then, in that school as in every school, there was the sinister minority, always huddling in corners, full of mean silences and furtive leering. And their half-heard words, half-understood phrases,— a gesture, a look that silenced and perplexed her — these the child brought also to her mother, sitting at her feet, face against her knees.

For a month or two her mother had not been very well, and the doctor who had brought Athalie into the world stopped in once or twice a week. When he was with her mother the children were forbidden the room.

One evening in particular Athalie remembered. She had been running her legs off playing hounds-and-hares across country from the salt-hay stacks to the chestnut ridge, and she had come in after sunset to find her mother sewing in her own bedroom, her brother and sisters studying their lessons in the sitting-room where her father also sat reading the local evening paper.

Supper was over, but Athalie went to the kitchen and presently returned to her mother's room carrying a bowl of bread and milk and half a pie.

Here on the faded carpet at her mother's feet, full in the lamplight she sat her down and ate in hungry silence while her mother sewed.

Athalie seldom studied. A glance at her books seemed to be enough for her. And she passed examinations without effort under circumstances where plodders would have courted disaster.

Rare questions from her mother, brief replies marked the meal. When she had satisfied her hunger she jumped up, ran downstairs with the empty dishes, and came slowly back again,— a slender, supple figure with tangled hair curling below her shoulders, dirty shirt-waist, soiled features and hands, and the ragged blue skirt of a sailor suit hanging to her knees.

"Your other sailor suit is washed and mended," said her mother, smiling at her child in tatters.

Athalie, her gaze remote, nodded absently. After a moment she lifted her steady dark blue eyes:

"A boy kissed me, mamma," she remarked, dropping cross-legged at her mother's feet.

"Don't kiss strange boys," said her mother quietly.

"I didn't. But why not?"

"It is not considered proper."

"Why?"

Her mother said: "Kissing is a common and vulgar practice except in the intimacy of one's own family."

"I thought so," nodded Athalie; "I soaked him for doing it."

"Who was he?"

"Oh, it was that fresh Harry Eldon. I told him if he ever tried to get fresh with me again I'd kill him. . . . Mamma?"

"Yes?"

"All that about poor old Mr. Manners isn't true, is it?"

Her mother smiled. The children had been taught to leave a morsel on their plates "for manners"; and to impress it upon them their mother had invented a story about a poor old man named Manners who depended upon what they left, and who crept in to eat it after they had retired from table.

So leaving something "for Manners" had been thoroughly and successfully inculcated, until the habit was formed. And now Athalie was the last of the children to discover the gentle fraud practised upon her.

"I'm glad, anyway," concluded the child. "I never thought we left him enough to eat."

Her mother said: "I shall tell you only truths after this. You are old enough to understand reason, now, and to reason a little yourself."

"I do. . . . But I am not yet perfectly sure where babies come from. You said you would tell me *that* some day. I'd really like to know, mamma."

Her mother continued to sew for a while, then, passing the needle through the hem she looked down at her daughter.

"Have you formed any opinion of your own?"

"Yes," said the child honestly.

"Then I'd better tell you the truth," said her mother tranquilly, "because the truth is very wonderful and beautiful — and interesting."

So she related to the child, very simply and clearly all that need be told concerning the mystery of life

in its beginnings; and Athalie listened, enchanted. And mostly it thrilled the child to realise that in her, too, lay latent a capability for the creation of life.

Another hour with her mother she remembered in after years.

Mrs. Greensleeve had not been as well: the doctor came oftener. Frequently Athalie returning from school discovered her mother lying on the bed. That evening the child was sitting on the floor at her mother's feet as usual, just inside the circle of lamplight, playing solitaire with an ancient pack of cards.

Presently something near the door attracted her attention and she lifted her head and sat looking at it, mildly interested, until, suddenly, she felt her mother's eyes on her, flushed hotly, and turned her head away.

"What were you looking at?" asked her mother in a low voice.

"Nothing, mamma."

"Athalie!"

"What, mamma?"

"*What* were you looking at?"

The child hung her head: "Nothing—" she began; but her mother checked her: "Don't lie, Athalie. I'll try to understand you. Now tell me what you were — what you thought you were looking at over there near the door."

The child turned and glanced back at the door over her shoulder.

"There is nothing there — now," she muttered.

"Was there anything?"

Athalie sat silent for a while, then she laid her clasped hands across her mother's knees and rested her cheek on them.

"There was a woman there," she said.

"Where?"

"Over by the door."

"You saw her, Athalie?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Did she open the door and come in and then close it behind her?"

"No."

"How did she come in?"

"I don't know. She — just came in."

"Was she a young woman?"

"No, old."

"Very old?"

"Not very. There was grey in her hair — a little."

"How was she dressed?"

"She wore a night-gown, mamma. There were spots on it — like medicine."

"Had you ever seen her before?"

"I think so."

"Who was she?"

"Mrs. Allen."

Her mother sat very still but her clasped hands tightened and a little of the colour faded from her cheeks. There was a Mrs. Allen who had been suffering from an illness which she herself was afraid she had.

"Do you mean Mrs. James Allen who lives on the old Allen farm?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, mamma."

In the morning they heard of Mrs. Allen's death. And it was several months before Mrs. Greensleeve again spoke to her daughter on the one subject about which Athalie was inclined to be most reticent. But that subject now held a deadly fascination for her mother.

They had been sitting together in Mrs. Greensleeve's bedroom, the mother knitting, in bed propped up upon the pillows. Athalie, cross-legged on a hassock beside her, was doing a little mending on her own account, when her mother said abruptly but very quietly:

"I have always known that you possess a power — which others cannot understand."

The child's face flushed deeply and she bent closer over her mending.

"I knew it when they first brought you to me, a baby just born. . . . I don't know how I knew it, but I did."

Athalie, sewing steadily, said nothing.

"I think," said her mother, "you are, in some degree, what is called clairvoyant."

"What?"

"Clairvoyant," repeated her mother quietly. "It comes from the French, *clair*, clear; the verb *voir*, to see; *clair-voyant*, seeing clearly. That is all, Athalie. . . . Nothing to be ashamed of — if it is

true,—" for the child had dropped her work and had hidden her face in her hands.

"Dear, are you afraid to talk about it to your mother?"

"N-no. What is there to say about it?"

"Nothing very much. Perhaps the less said the better . . . I don't know, little daughter. I don't understand it — comprehend it. If it's so, it's so. . . . I see you sometimes looking at things I cannot see; I know sometimes you hear sounds which I cannot hear. . . . Things happen which perplex the rest of us; and, somehow I seem to know that they do not perplex you. What to us seems unnatural to you is natural, even a commonplace matter of course."

"That's it, mamma. I have never seen anything that did not seem quite natural to me."

"Did you know that Mrs. Allen had died when you — thought you saw her?"

"I did see her."

"Yes. . . . Did you know she had died?"

"Not until I saw her."

"Did you know it then?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I don't know how I knew it. I seemed to know it."

"Did you know she had been ill?"

"No, mamma."

"Did it in any way frighten you — make you uneasy when you saw her standing there?"

"Why, no," said Athalie, surprised.

"Not even when you knew she was dead?"

"No. Why should it? Why should I be afraid?"

Her mother was silent.

"Why?" asked Athalie, curiously. "Is there anything to be afraid of with God and all his angels watching us? Is there?"

"No."

"Then," said the child with some slight impatience, "why is it that other people seem to be a little afraid of me and of what they say I can hear and see? I have good eyesight; I see clearly; that is all, isn't it? And there is nothing to frighten anybody in seeing clearly, is there?"

"No, dear."

"People make me so cross," continued Athalie,—"and so ashamed when they ask so many questions. What is there to be surprised at if sometimes I see things *inside* my mind. They are just as real as when I see them *outside*. They are no different."

Her mother nodded, encouragingly.

"When papa was in New York," went on Athalie, "and I saw him talking to some men in a hotel there, why should it be surprising just because papa was in New York and I was here when I saw him?"

"It surprises others, dear, because they cannot see what is beyond the vision of their physical senses."

Athalie said: "They tease me in school because they say I can see around corners. It makes me very cross and unhappy, and I don't want anybody to know that I see what they can't see. I'm ashamed to have them know it."

"Perhaps it is just as well you feel that way. People are odd. What they do not understand they ridicule. A dog that would not notice a horse-drawn vehicle will bark at an automobile."

"Mamma?"

"Yes, dear."

"Do you know that dogs, and I think cats, too, see many things that I do; and that other people do not see."

"Why do you think so?"

"I have noticed it. . . . The other evening when the white cat was dozing on your bed, and I was down here on the floor, sewing, I saw — something. And the cat looked up suddenly and saw it, too."

"Athalie!"

"She did, mamma. I knew perfectly well that she saw what I saw."

"What was it you saw?"

"Only a young man. He walked over to the window —"

"And then?"

"I don't know, mamma. I don't know where they go. They go, that's all I know."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know."

"Did he look at us?"

"Yes . . . He seemed to be thinking of something pleasant."

"Did he smile?"

"He — had a pleasant look . . . And once,— it was last Sunday — over by the bed I saw a little boy.

He was kneeling down beside the bed. And Mr. Ledlie's dog was lying here beside me . . . Don't you remember how he suddenly lifted his head and barked?"

"Yes, I remember. But you didn't tell me why at the time."

"I didn't like to. . . . I never like to speak about these — people — I see."

"Had you ever before seen the little boy?"

"No, mamma."

"Was he — alive — do you think?"

"Why, yes. They all are alive."

"Mrs. Allen was not alive when you saw her over by the door."

The child looked puzzled. "Yes," she said, "but that was a little different. Not *very* different. They are all perfectly alive, mamma."

"Even the ones we call dead? Are you sure of it?"

"Yes. . . . Yes, I'm sure of it. They are not dead. . . . Nothing seems to die. Nothing stays dead."

"What! Why do you believe that?"

Athalie said slowly: "Somebody shot and killed a poor little dog, once,— just across the causeway bridge . . . And the dog came into the garden afterward and ran all around, smelling, and wagging his tail."

"Athalie! Athalie! Be careful to control your imagination."

"Yes," said the child, thoughtfully, "I must be careful to control it. I can imagine almost anything if I try."

"How hard have you ever tried to imagine some of the things you see — or think you see?"

"Mamma, I never try. I — I don't care to see them. I'd rather not. Those things come. *I* haven't anything to do with it. I don't know these people, and I am not interested. I *did* try to see papa in New York — if you call that imagination."

But her mother did not know what to call it because at the hour when Athalie had seen him, that mild and utterly unimaginative man was actually saying and doing what his daughter had seen and heard.

"Also," said Athalie," I *was* thinking about that poor little yellow dog and wondering whether he was past all suffering, when he came gaily trotting into the garden, waving his tail quite happily. There was no dust or blood on him. He rolled on the grass, too, and barked and barked. But nobody seemed to hear him or notice him excepting I."

For a long while silence reigned in the lamp-lit room. When the other children came in to say good night to their mother she received them with an unusual tenderness. They went away; Athalie rose, yawning the yawn of healthy fatigue:

"Good night, mamma."

"Good night, little daughter."

They kissed: the mother drew her into a sudden and almost convulsive embrace.

"Darling, are you sure that nothing really dies?"

"*I* have never seen anything really dead, mamma. Even the 'dead' birds,— why, the evening sky is full of

them — the little 'dead' ones I mean — flock after flock, twittering and singing —"

"Dear!"

"Yes, mamma."

"When you see me — *that* way — will you — speak?"

"Yes."

"Promise, darling."

"Yes. . . . I'll kiss you, too — if it is possible . . ."

"Would it be possible?"

The child gazed at her, perplexed and troubled: "I — don't — know," she said slowly. Then, all in a moment her childish face paled and she clung to her mother and began to cry.

And her mother soothed her, tenderly, smilingly, kissing the tears from the child's eyes.

The next morning after the children had gone to school Mrs. Greensleeve was operated on — without success.

CHAPTER III

THE black dresses of the children had become very rusty by spring, but business had been bad at the Hotel Greensleeve, and Athalie, Doris, and Catharine continued to wear their shabby mourning.

Greensleeve haunted the house all day long, roaming from bar to office, from one room to another, silently opening doors of unoccupied chambers to peer about in the dusty obscurity, then noiselessly closing them, he would slink away down the dim corridor to his late wife's room and sit there through the long sunny afternoon, his weak face buried in his hands.

Ledlie had grown fatter, redder of visage, whiter of hair and beard. When a rare guest arrived, or when local loafers wandered into the bar with the faint stench of fertilizer clinging to their boots, he shuffled ponderously from office to bar, serving as economically as he dared whoever desired to be served.

Always a sprig of something green protruded from his small tight mouth. His pale eyes, now faded almost colourless, had become weak and red-rimmed, and he blinked continually except in the stale semi-darkness of the house.

Always, now, he was muttering and grumbling his disapproval of the children —"Eatin' their heads off

I tell you, Pete! What good is all this here schoolin' doin' 'em when they ought to git out some'rs an' earn their vittles?"

But if Greensleeve's attitude was one of passive acquiescence, he made no effort to withdraw the children from school. Once, when life was younger, and Jack, his first baby, came, he had dreamed of college for him, and of a career — in letters perhaps — something dignified, leisurely, profound beyond his own limits. And of a modest corner somewhere within the lustre of his son's environment where he and his wife, grey-haired, might dream and admire, finding there surcease from care and perhaps the peace which passes all understanding.

The ex-"professor" of penmanship had been always prone to dream. No dull and sordid reality, no hopeless sorrow had yet awakened him. Nor had his wife's death been more real than the half-strangled anguish of a dreamer, tossing in darkness. As for the children, they paid no more attention to Ledlie than they might have to a querulous but superannuated dog.

Jack, now fifteen, still dawdled at school, where his record was not good. Perhaps it was partly because he had no spending money, no clothing to maintain his boyish self-respect, no prospects of any sort, that he had become sullen, uncommunicative, and almost loutish.

Nobody governed him; his father was unqualified to control anybody or anything; his mother was dead.

With her death went the last vestige of any tie that had held the boy to the home anchorage — of any

feeling of responsibility concerning the conduct expected and required of him.

He shirked his studies, came home only to eat and sleep, remained out late without explanation or any home interference, except for the constant disputes and quarrels with Doris and Catharine, now aged respectively fourteen and thirteen.

To Athalie he had little to say. Perhaps he did not realise it but he was slightly afraid of her. And it was from her that he took any pains at all to conceal his irregularities.

Once, coming in from school, she had found the house deserted, and Jack smelling of alcohol just slouching out of the bar.

"If you do that again I shall tell father," she said, horrified.

"What do I care!" he had retorted sullenly. And it was true; the boy no longer cared what anybody might think as long as Athalie already knew and detested what he had done.

There was a garage in the neighbouring village. He spent most of his time hanging around it. Sometimes he came home reeking of oil and gasoline, sometimes his breath was tainted with tobacco and alcohol.

He was so much bigger and older than Athalie that the child had never entirely lost her awe of him. His weakness of character, his failings, and the fact that he was a trifle afraid of her opinion, combined to astonish and bewilder her.

For a long while she tried to understand the gradual but certain reversal of their relations. And one night,

still more or less in awe of him, she got out of bed and went softly into his room.

He was not asleep. The sudden apparition of his youngest sister considerably startled him, and he sat up in his ragged night-shirt and stared at her where she stood in the moonlight.

"You look like one of your own spooks!" he said. "What's the matter with you?"

"I wanted to talk with you, Jack."

"What about?"

"You."

For a moment he sat there eyeing her uneasily; then:

"Well, go ahead!" he said ungraciously; and stretched himself back on the pillows.

She came and seated herself on the bed's edge:

"Jack, please don't drink beer."

"Why not? Aw, what do you know about men, anyway? Don't they all smoke and drink?"

"Mamma asked you not to."

"Gee-whiz! I was a kid then. But a man isn't a baby."

Athalie sighed. Her brother eyed her restlessly, aware of that slight feeling of shame which always invaded his sullen, defiant discontent when he knew that he had lowered himself in her estimation.

For, if the boy was a little afraid of her, he also cared more for her than he ever had for any of the family except his mother.

He was only the average boy, stumbling blindly, almost savagely through the maze of adolescence, with

no guide, nobody to warn or counsel him, nothing to stimulate his pride, no anchorage, no experience.

Whatever character he had he had been born with: it was environment and circumstance that were crippling it.

"See here, Athalie," he said, "you're a little girl and you don't understand. There isn't any harm in my smoking a cigarette or two or in drinking a glass of beer now and then."

"Isn't there, Jack?"

"No. So don't you worry, Sis. . . . And, say! I'm not going back to school."

"What?"

"What's the use? I can't go to college. Anyway what's the good of algebra and physics and chemistry and history and all that junk? I guess I'll go into business."

"What business?"

"I don't know. I've been working around the garage. I can get a job there if I want it."

"Did you ask papa?"

"What's the use? He'll let me do what I please. I guess I'll start in to-morrow."

His father did not interfere when his only son came slouching up to inform him of his decision.

After Jack had gone away toward the village and his new business, his father remained seated on the shabby veranda, his head sunken on his soiled shirt-front, his wasted hands clasped over his stomach.

For a little while, perhaps, he remembered his earlier

ambitions for the boy's career. Maybe they caused him pain. But if there was pain it faded gradually into the lethargy which had settled over him since his wife's death.

A grey veil seemed to have descended between him and the sun,— there was greyness everywhere, and dimness, and uncertainty — in his mind, in his eyesight — and sometimes the vagueness was in his speech. He had noticed that — for, sometimes the word he meant to use was not the word he uttered. It had occurred a number of times, making foolish what he had said.

And Ledlie had glanced at him sharply once or twice out of his sore and faded eyes when Greensleeve had used some word while thinking of another.

When he was not wandering around the house he sat on the veranda in a great splint-bottomed armchair — a little untidy figure, more or less caved in from chest to abdomen, which made his short thin legs hanging just above the floor seem stunted and withered.

To him, here, came his daughters in their soiled and rusty black dresses, just out of school, and always stopping on impulse of sympathy to salute him with, "Hello, papa!" and with the touch of fresh, warm lips on his colourless cheek.

Sometimes they lingered to chatter around him, or bring out pie and cake to eat in his company. But very soon his gaze became remote, and the children understood that they were at liberty to go, which they did, dancing happily away into the outer sunshine, on

pleasure bent — the matchless pleasures of the very young whose poverty has not as yet disturbed them.

As the summer passed the sunlight grew greyer to Peter Greensleeve. Also, more often, he mixed his words and made nonsense of what he said.

The pain in his chest and arms which for a year had caused him discomfort, bothered him at night, now. He said nothing about it.

That summer Doris had taken a course in stenography and typewriting, going every day to Brooklyn by train and returning before sunset.

When school began she asked to be allowed to continue. Catharine, too, desired to learn. And if their father understood very clearly what they wanted, it is uncertain. Anyway he offered no objections.

That winter he saw his son very seldom. Perhaps the boy was busy. Once or twice he came to ask his father for money, but there was none to give him,— very little for anybody — and Doris and Catharine required that.

Some little money was taken in at the Hotel Greensleeve; commercial men were rather numerous that winter: so were duck-hunters. Athalie often saw them stamping around in the bar, the lamplight glistening on their oil-skins and gun-barrels, and touching the silken plumage of dead ducks — great strings of them lying on the bar or on the floor.

Once when she came home from school earlier than usual, she went into the kitchen and found a hot peach turnover awaiting her, constructed for her by the slovenly cook, and kept hot by the still more slovenly

maid-of-all-work — the only servants at the Hotel Greensleeve.

Sauntering back through the house, eating her turnover, she noticed Mr. Ledlie reading his newspaper in the office and her father apparently asleep on a chair before the stove.

There were half a dozen guests at the inn, duck-hunters from New York, but they were evidently still out with their bay-men.

Nibbling her pastry Athalie loitered along the hall and deposited her strapped books on a chair under the noisy wall-clock. Then, at hazard, she wandered into the bar. It was growing dusky; nobody had lighted the ceiling lamp.

At first she thought the room was empty, and had strolled over toward the stove to warm her snow-wet shoes, when all at once she became aware of a boy.

The boy was lying back on a leather chair, stockinged feet crossed, hands in his pocket, looking at her. He wore the leather shooting clothes of a duck-hunter; on the floor beside him lay his cap, oil-skins, hip-boots, and his gun. A red light from the stove fell across his dark, curly hair and painted one side of his face crimson.

Athalie, surprised, was not, however, in the least disturbed or embarrassed. She looked calmly at the boy, at the woollen stockings on his feet.

"Did you manage to get dry?" she asked in a friendly voice.

Then he seemed to come to himself. He took his

hands from his pockets and got up on his stockinged feet.

"Yes, I'm dry now."

"Did you have any luck?"

"I got fifteen — counting shell-drake, two redheads, a black duck, and some buffle-heads."

"Where were you shooting?"

"Off Silver Shoal."

"Who was your bay-man?"

"Bill Nostrand."

"Why did you stop shooting so early?"

"Fifteen is the local limit this year."

Athalie nodded and bit into her turnover, reflectively. When she looked up, something in the boy's eye interested her.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

He looked embarrassed, then laughed: "Yes, I am."

"Wait; I'll get you a turnover," she said.

When she returned from the kitchen with his turnover he was standing. Rather vaguely she comprehended this civility toward herself although nobody had ever before remained standing for her.

Not knowing exactly what to do or say she silently presented the pastry, then drew a chair up into the red firelight. And the boy seated himself.

"I suppose you came with those hunters from New York," she said.

"Yes. I came with my father and three of his friends."

"They are out still I suppose."

"Yes. They went over to Brant Point."

"I've often sailed there," remarked Athalie. "Can you sail a boat?"

"No."

"It is easy. . . . I could teach you if you are going to stay a while."

"We are going back to New York to-morrow morning. . . . How did you learn to sail a boat?"

"Why, I don't know. I've always lived here. Mr. Ledlie has a boat. Everybody here knows how to manage a cat-boat. . . . If you'll come down this summer I'll teach you. Will you?"

"I will if I can."

They were silent for a few minutes. It grew very dark in the bar-room, and the light from the stove glimmered redder and redder.

The boy and girl lay back in their chairs, lingering over their peach pastry, and inspecting each other with all the frank insouciance of childhood.

Athalie still wore the red hood and cloak which had represented her outer winter wardrobe for years. Her dull, thick gold hair curled crisply over the edges of the hood which framed in its oval the lovely features of a child in perfect health.

The boy, dark-haired and dark-eyed, gazed fascinated and unembarrassed at this golden blond visitor hooded and cloaked in scarlet.

"Does your father keep this hotel?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes. I am Athalie Greensleeve. What is your name?"

"C. Bailey, Junior."

"What is the *C* for?"

"Clive."

"Do you go to school?"

"Yes, but I'm back for the holidays."

"Holidays," she repeated vaguely. "Oh, that's so. Christmas will come day after to-morrow."

He nodded. "I think I'm going to have a new pair of guns, some books, and a horse. What do you expect?"

"Nothing," said Athalie.

"What? Isn't there anything you want?" And then, too late, some glimmer of the real state of affairs illuminated his boyish brain. And he grew red with embarrassment.

They had finished their pastry; Athalie wiped her hands on a soiled and ragged and crumpled handkerchief, then scrubbed her scarlet mouth.

"I'd like to come down here for the summer vacation," said the boy, awkwardly. "I don't know whether my mother would like it."

"Why? It is pleasant."

He glanced instinctively around him at the dark and shabby bar-room, but offered no reason why his mother might not care for the Hotel Greensleeve. One thing he knew; he meant to urge his mother to come, or to let him come.

A few minutes later the outer door banged open and into the bar came stamping four men and two baymen, their oil-skins shining with salt-spray, guns glistening. Thud! went the strings of dead ducks on

"'I'd like to come down here for the summer vacation,' said the boy, awkwardly."

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the floor; somebody scratched a match and lighted the ceiling lamp.

"Hello, Junior!" cried one of the men in oil-skins,—"how did you make out on Silver Shoals?"

"All right, father," he began; but his father had caught sight of Athalie who had risen to retreat.

"Who are you, young lady?" he inquired with a jolly smile,—"are you little Red-Riding Hood or the Princess Far Away, or perhaps the Sleeping Beauty recently awakened?"

"I'm Athalie Greensleeve."

"Lady Greensleeves! I *knew* you were somebody quite as distinguished as you are beautiful. Would you mind saying to Mr. Greensleeve that there is much moaning on the bar, and that it will still continue until he arrives to instil the stillness of the still—"

"What?"

"We merely want a drink, my child. Don't look so seriously and distractingly pretty. I was joking, that's all. Please tell your father how very thirsty we are."

As the child turned to obey C. Bailey, Sr., put one big arm around her shoulders: "I didn't mean to tease you on such short acquaintance," he whispered. "Are you offended, little Lady Greensleeves?"

Athalie looked up at him in puzzled silence.

"Smile, just once, so I shall know I am forgiven," he said. "Will you?"

The child smiled confusedly, caught the boy's eye, and smiled again, most engagingly, at C. Bailey, Sr.'s, son.

"Oho!" exclaimed the senior Bailey laughingly and looking at his son, "I'm forgiven for your sake, am I?"

"For heaven's sake, Clive," protested one of the gunners, "let the little girl go and find her father. If I ever needed a drink it's now!"

So Athalie went away to summon her father. She found him as she had last noticed him, sitting asleep on the big leather office chair. Ledlie, behind the desk, was still reading his soiled newspaper, which he continued to do until Athalie cried out something in a frightened voice. Then he laid aside his paper, blinked at her, got up leisurely and shuffled over to where his partner was sitting dead on his leather chair.

The duck-hunters left that night. One after another the four gentlemen came over to speak to Athalie and to her sisters. There was some confusion and crowding in the hallway, what with the doctor, the undertaker's assistants, neighbours, and the New York duck-hunters.

Ledlie ventured to overcharge them on the bill. As nobody objected he regretted his moderation. However, the taking off of Greensleeve helped business in the bar where sooner or later everybody drifted.

When the four-seated livery wagon drove up to take the gunning party to the train, the boy lingered behind the others and then hurried back to where Athalie was standing, white-faced, tearless, staring at the closed door of the room where they had taken her father.

Bailey Junior's touch on her arm made her turn: "I am sorry," he said. "I hope you will not be very unhappy. . . . And — here is a Christmas present —"

He took the dazed child's icy little hand in his, and, fumbling the business rather awkwardly, he finally contrived to snap a strap-watch over the delicate wrist. It was the one he had been wearing.

"Good-bye, Athalie," he murmured, very red.

The girl gazed at him out of her lovely confused eyes for a moment. But when she tried to speak no sound came.

"Good-bye," he said again, choking slightly. "I'll surely, surely come back to see you. Don't be unhappy. I'll come."

But it was many years before he returned to the Hotel Greensleeve.

CHAPTER IV

SHE was fifteen years old before she saw him again. His strap-watch was still on her wrist; his memory, unfaded, still enshrined in her heart of a child, for she was as yet no more than that at fifteen. And the moment she saw him she recognised him.

It was on the Sixth Avenue Elevated Station at Twenty-third Street one sunny day in April; he stood waiting for the downtown train which she stepped out of when it stopped.

He did not notice her, so she went over to him and called him by name; and the tall, good-looking, fashionably dressed young fellow turned to her without recognition.

But the next instant his smooth, youthful face lighted up, and off came his hat with the gay college band adorning it:

"Athalie Greensleeve!" he exclaimed, showing his pleasure unmistakably.

"C. Bailey, Junior," she rejoined as steadily as she could, for her heart was beating wildly with the excitement of meeting him and her emotions were not under full control.

"You have grown so," he said with the easy, boyish cordiality of his caste, "I didn't recognise you for a

moment. Tell me, do you still live down — er — down there?"

She said:

"I knew you as soon as I set eyes on you. You are very much taller, too. . . . No, we went away from Spring Pond the year after my father died."

"I see," he said sympathetically. And back into his memory flashed that scene with her by the stove in the dusky bar. And then he remembered her as she stood in her red hood and cloak staring at the closed door of the room where her dead father lay. And he remembered touching her frosty little hand, and the incident of the watch.

"I never went back there," he mused, half to himself, looking curiously at the girl before him. "I wanted to go — but I never did."

"No, you never came back," she said slowly.

"I couldn't. I was only a kid, you see. My mother wouldn't let me go there that summer. And father and I joined a club down South so we did not go back for the duck-shooting. That is how it happened."

She nodded, gravely, but said nothing to him about her faith in his return, how confidently, how patiently she had waited through that long, long summer for the boy who never returned.

"I did think of you often," he volunteered, smiling at her.

"I thought of you, too. I hoped you would come and let me teach you to sail a boat."

"That's so! I remember now. You were going to show me how."

"Have you learned to sail a boat?"

"No. I'll tell you what I'll do, Athalie, I'll come down this summer —"

"But I don't live there any more."

"That's so. Where do you live?"

She hesitated, and his eyes fell for the first time from her youthful and engaging face to the clothes she wore — black clothes that seemed cheap even to a boy who had no knowledge of feminine clothing. She was all in rusty black, hat, gloves, jacket and skirt; and the austere and slightly mean setting made the contrast of her hair and skin the more fresh and vivid.

"I live," she replied diffidently, "with my two sisters in West Fifty-fourth Street. I am stenographer and typewriter in the offices of a department store."

"I'd like to come to see you," he said impulsively. "Shall I — when vacation begins?"

"Are you still at school?"

He laughed: "I'm at Harvard. I'm down for Easter just now. Tell me, Athalie, would you care to have me come to see you when I return?"

"If you would care to come."

"I surely would!" he said cordially, offering his hand in adieu —"I want to ask you a lot of questions and we can talk over all those jolly old times,"— as though years of comradeship lay behind them instead of an hour or two. Then his glance fell on the slim hand he was shaking, and he saw the strap-watch which he had given her still clasped around her wrist.

"You wear that yet? — that old shooting-watch of mine!" he laughed.

"'I'm glad I saw you,' said the girl; 'I hope you won't forget me.'"

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She smiled.

"I'll give you a better one than that next Christmas," he said, taking out a little notebook and pencil. "I'll write it down — 'strap-watch for Athalie Greensleeve next Christmas' — there it is! And — will you give me your address?"

She gave it; he noted it, closed his little Russia-leather book with a snap, and pocketed it.

"I'm glad I saw you," said the girl; "I hope you won't forget me. I am late; I must go — I suppose —"

"Indeed I won't forget you," he assured her warmly, shaking the slender black-gloved hand again.

He meant it when he said it. Besides she was so pretty and frank and honest with him. Few girls he knew in his own caste were as attractive; none as simple, as direct.

He really meant to call on her some day and talk things over. But days, and weeks, and finally months slipped away. And somehow, in thinking of her and of his promise, there now seemed very little left for them to talk about. After all they had said to each other nearly all there was to be said, there on the Elevated platform that April morning. Besides he had so many, many things to do; so many pleasures promised and accepted, visits to college friends, a fishing trip with his father,— really there seemed to be no hour in the long vacation unengaged.

He always wanted to see her when he thought of her; he really meant to find a moment to do it, too. But there seemed to be no moment suitable.

Even when he was back in Cambridge he thought about her occasionally, and planned, vaguely, a trip to New York so that he might redeem his promise to her.

He took it out in thinking.

At Christmas, however, he sent her a wrist-watch, a dainty French affair of gold and enamel; and a contrite note excusing himself for the summer delinquencies and renewing his promise to call on her.

The Dead Letter Office returned watch and letter.

CHAPTER V

THERE was a suffocating stench of cabbage in hallway and corridor as usual when Athalie came in that evening. She paused to rest a tired foot on the first step of the stairway, for a moment or two, quietly breathing her fatigue, then addressed herself to the monotonous labour before her, which was to climb five flights of unventilated stairs, let herself into the tiny apartment with her latch-key, and immediately begin her part in preparing the evening meal for three.

Doris, now twenty-one, sprawled on a lounge in her faded wrapper reading an evening paper. Catharine, a year younger, stood by a bureau, some drawers of which had been pulled out, sorting over odds and ends of crumpled finery.

"Well," remarked Doris to Athalie, as she came in, "what do *you* know?"

"Nothing," said Athalie listlessly.

Doris rattled the evening paper: "Gee!" she commented, "it's getting to be something fierce — all these young girls disappearing! Here's another — they can't account for it; her parents say she had no love affair —" And she began to read the account aloud while Catharine continued to sort ribbons and Athalie dropped into a big, shabby chair, legs extended, arms pendant.

When Doris finished reading she tossed the paper over to Athalie who let it slide from her knees to the floor.

"Her picture is there," said Doris. "She isn't pretty."

"Isn't she?" yawned Athalie.

Catharine jerked open another drawer: "It's always a man's doing. You bet they'll find that some fellow had her on a string. What idiots girls are!"

"*I* should worry," remarked Doris. "Any fresh young man who tries to get me jingled will wish he hadn't."

"Don't talk that way," remonstrated Athalie.

"What way?"

"That slangy way you think is smart. What's the use of letting down when you know better."

"What's the use of keeping up on fifteen per? I could do the Gladys to any Percy on fifty. My talk suits my wages — and it suits me, too. . . . God! — I suppose it's fried ham again to-night," she added, jumping up and walking into the kitchenette. And, pausing to look back at her sisters: "If any Johnny asks me to-night I'll go! — I'm that hungry for real food."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Catharine.

Athalie glanced at the alarm clock, passed her hands wearily across her eyes, and rose: "It's after six, Doris. You haven't time for anything very much." And she went into the kitchenette.

Once or twice during the preparation of the meal Doris swore in her soft girlish voice, which made the

contrast peculiarly shocking; and finally Athalie said bluntly: "If I didn't know you were straight I wouldn't think so from the way you behave."

Doris turned on her a flushed and angry face: "Will you kindly stop knocking me?"

"I'm not. I'm only saying that your talk is loose. And so it is."

"What's the difference as long as I'm not on the loose myself?"

"The difference is that men will think you are; that's all."

"Men mistake any girl who works for a living."

"Then see that the mistake is their fault not you. I don't understand why a girl can't keep her self respect even if she's a stenographer, as I am, or work in a shop as Catharine does, or in the theatre as you do. And if a girl talks loosely, she'll think loose sooner or later."

"Hurry up that supper!" called Catharine. "I'm going to a show with Genevieve, and I want time to dress."

Athalie, scrambling the eggs, which same eggs would endure no other mode of preparation, leaned over sideways and kissed Doris on her lovely neck.

"Darling," she said, "I'm not trying to be disagreeable; I only want us all to keep up."

"I know it, ducky. I guess you're right. I'll cut out that rough stuff if you like."

Athalie said: "It's only too easy to let down when you're thrown with careless and uneducated people as we are. I have to struggle against it all the while. For,

somehow I seem to know that a girl who keeps up her grammar keeps up her self-respect, too. If you slouch mentally you slouch physically. And then it's not so difficult to slouch morally."

Doris laughed: "You funny thing! You certainly have educated yourself a lot since school,— you use such dandy English."

"I *read* good English."

"I know you do. I can't. If somebody would only write a rattling story in good English!— but I've got to have the story first of all or I can't read it. All those branch-library books you lug in are too slow for me. If it wasn't for hearing you talk every day I'd talk like the rest of the chorus at the Egyptian Queen; 'Sa-ay, ain't you done with my make-up box? Yaas, you *did* swipe it! I seen you. Who's a liar? All right, if you want to mix it—'"

"Don't!" pleaded Athalie. "Oh, Doris, I don't see why you can't find some other business—"

Doris began to strut about the kitchenette.

"Please don't! It makes me actually ill!"

"When I learn how to use my voice and my legs you'll see me playing leads. Here, ducky, I'll take the eggs—"

Athalie, her arms also full, followed her out to the table which Catharine had set very carelessly.

They drank Croton water and strong tea, and gravely discussed how, from their several limited wardrobes sufficient finery might be extracted to clothe Catharine suitably for her evening's entertainment.

"It's rotten to be poor," remarked the latter.

"You're only young once, and this gosh-dinged poverty spoils everything for me."

"Quit kicking," said Doris. "I don't like these eggs but I'm eating them. If I were wealthy I'd be eating terrapin, wouldn't I?"

"Genevieve has a new gown for to-night," pouted Catharine. "How can I help feeling shabby and unhappy?"

"Genevieve seems to have a number of unaccountable things," remarked Doris, partly closing her velvet eyes. "She has a fur coat, too."

"Doris! That isn't square of you!"

"That isn't the question. Is Genevieve on the square? That's what worries me, Kit!"

"What a perfectly rotten thing to say!" insisted Catharine resentfully. "You know she's on the level!"

"Well then, *where* does she get it? You know what her salary is?"

Athalie said, coolly: "Every girl ought to believe every other girl on the square until the contrary is proven. It's shameful not to."

"Come over to the Egyptian Garden and try it!" laughed Doris. "If you can believe that bunch of pet cats is on the square you can believe anything, Athalie."

Catharine, still very deeply offended, rose and went into the bedroom which she shared with Doris. Presently she called for somebody to assist her in dressing.

Doris, being due at the theatre by seven o'clock, put on her rusty coat and hat, and, nodding to Athalie,

walked out; and the latter went away to aid Catharine.

"You *do* look pretty," she insisted after Catharine had powdered her face and neck and had wiped off her silky skin with the chamois rag.

The girl gazed at her comely, regular features in the mirror, patted her hair, moistened her red lips, then turned her profile and gazed at it with the aid of a hand-glass.

"Who else is going?" inquired Athalie.

"Some friends of Genevieve's."

"Men?"

"I believe so."

"Two, I suppose."

Catharine nodded.

"Don't you know their names?"

"No. Genevieve says that one of them is crazy to meet me."

"Where did he see you?"

"At Winton's. I put on some evening gowns for his sister."

Athalie watched her pin on her hat, then held her coat for her. "They'll all bear watching," she remarked quietly. "If it's merely society they want you know as well as I that they seek it in their own circles, not in ours."

Catharine made no audible response. She began to re-pin her hat, then, pettishly: "I wish I had a taxi to call for me so I needn't wear a hat!"

"Why not wish for an automobile?" suggested Athalie, laughing. "Women who have them don't wear hats to the theatre."

"It *is* tough to be poor!" insisted Catharine fiercely. "It drives me almost frantic to see what I see in all those limousines,— and then walk home, or take a car if I'm flush."

"How are you going to help it, dear?" inquired Athalie in that gently humorous voice which usually subdued and shamed her sisters.

But Catharine only mumbled something rebellious, turned, stared at herself in the glass, and walked quickly toward the door.

"As for me," she muttered. "I don't blame any girl —"

"What?"

But Catharine marched out with a twitch of her narrow skirts, still muttering incoherencies.

Athalie, thoughtful, but not really disturbed, went into the empty sitting-room, picked up the evening paper, glanced absently at the head-lines, dropped it, and stood motionless in the centre of the room, one narrow hand bracketed on her hip, the other pinching her under lip.

For a few minutes she mused, then sighing, she walked into the kitchenette, unhooked a blue-checked apron, rolled up her sleeves as far as her white, rounded arms permitted, and started in on the dishes.

Occasionally she whistled at her task — the clear, soft, melodious whistle of a bullfinch — carolling some light, ephemeral air from the "Review" at the Egyptian Garden.

When the crockery was done, dried and re-placed, she retired to her bedroom and turned her attention to her

Grossman's reputation was different, but except for a smirk or two he had never bothered her. Nor did anybody else connected with the firm. They all were too much afraid of Wahlbaum.

So, except for the petty, contemptible annoyances to which all young girls are more or less subjected in any cosmopolitan metropolis, Athalie had found business agreeable enough except for the confinement.

That was hard on a country-bred girl; and she could scarcely endure the imprisonment when the warm sun of April looked in through the windows of Mr. Wahlbaum's private office, and when soft breezes stirred the curtains and fluttered the papers on her desk.

Always in the spring the voice of brook and surf, of woodland and meadow called to her. In her ears was ever the happy tumult of the barn-yard, the lowing of cattle at the bars, the bleat of sheep. And her heart beat passionate response.

Athalie was never ill. The nearest she came to it was a dull feeling of languor in early spring. But it did not even verge on either resentment or despondency.

In winter it was better. She had learned to accept with philosophy the noises of the noisiest of cities. Even, perhaps, she rather liked them, or at least, on her two weeks' vacation in the country, she found, to her surprise, that she missed the accustomed and incessant noises of New York.

Her real hardships were two; poverty and loneliness. The combined earnings of herself and her sisters did not allow them a better ventilated, or more comfortable

apartment than the grimy one they lived in. Nor did their earnings permit them more or better clothing and food.

As for loneliness, she had, of course, her sisters. But healthy, imaginative, ardent youth requires more than sisters,— more even than feminine friends, of which Athalie had a few. What she needed, as all girls need, were acquaintances and friends among men of her own age.

And she had none — that is, no friends. Which is the usual fate of any business girl who keeps up such education and cultivation as she possesses, and attempts to add to it and to improve her quality.

Because the men of her social and business level are vastly inferior to the women,— inferior in manners, cultivation, intelligence, quality — which seems almost to make their usually excellent morals peculiarly offensive.

That was why Athalie knew loneliness. Doris, recently, had met a few idle men of cultivated and fashionable antecedents. Catharine, that very evening, was evidently going to meet a man of that sort for the first time in her career.

As for Athalie, she had had no opportunity to meet any man she cared to cultivate since she had last talked with C. Bailey, Jr., on the platform of the Sixth Avenue Elevated; — and that was now nearly four years ago.

Braiding up her hair she sat gazing at herself in the mirror while her detached thoughts drifted almost any-

where — back to Spring Pond and the Hotel Greensleeve, back to her mother, to the child cross-legged on the floor,— back to her father, and how he sat there dead in his leather chair; — back to the bar, and the red gleam of the stove, and a boy and girl in earnest conversation there in the semi-darkness, eating peach turnovers —

She turned her head, leisurely: the electric bell had sounded twice before she realised that she ought to pull the wire which opened the street door below.

So she got up, pulled the wire, and then sauntered out into the sitting-room and set the door ajar, not worrying about her somewhat intimate costume because it was too late for tradesmen, and there was nobody else to call on her or on her sisters excepting other girls known to them all.

The sitting-room seemed chilly. Half listening for the ascending footsteps and the knocking, partly absorbed in other thoughts, she seated herself and lay back in the dingy arm-chair, before the radiator, elevating her dainty feet to the top of it and crossing them.

A gale was now blowing outside; invisible rain, or more probably sleet, pelted and swished across the curtained panes. Far away in the city, somewhere, a fire-engine rushed clanging through cañons, storm-swept, luminously obscure. Her nickel alarm clock ticked loudly in the room; the radiator clicked and fizzed and snapped.

Presently she heard a step on the stair, then in the corridor outside her door. Then came the knocking on

the door but unexpectedly loud, vigorous and impatient.

And Athalie, surprised, twisted around in her chair, looking over her shoulder at the door.

"Please come in," she said in her calm young voice.

CHAPTER VI

A RATHER tall man stepped in. He wore a snow-dusted, fur-lined overcoat and carried in his white-gloved hands a top hat and a silver-hooked walking stick.

He had made a mistake, of course; and Athalie hastily lowered her feet and turned half around in her chair again to meet his expected apologies; and then continued in that attitude, rigid and silent.

"Miss Greensleeve?" he asked.

She rose, mechanically, the heavy lustrous braids framing a face as white as a flower.

"Is that *you*, Athalie!" he asked, hesitating.

"C. Bailey, Junior," she said under her breath.

There was a moment's pause, then he stepped toward her and, very slowly, she offered a hand still faintly fragrant with "cream of lilacs."

A damp, chilly wind came from the corridor; she went over and closed the door, stood for a few seconds with her back against it looking at him.

Now under the mask of manhood she could see the boy she had once known,— under the short dark moustache the clean-cut mouth unchanged. Only his cheeks seemed firmer and leaner, and the eyes were now the baffling eyes of a man.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked, quite

unconscious of her own somewhat intimate attire, so entirely had the shock of surprise possessed her.

"Athalie, you have not changed a bit — only you are so much prettier than I realised," he said illogically . . . "How did I know you lived here? I didn't until we bought this row of flats last week — my father's company — I'm in it now. . . . And glancing over the list of tenants I saw your name."

She said nothing.

"Do you mind my coming? I was going to write and ask you. But walking in this way rather appealed to me. Do you mind?"

"No."

"May I stay and chat for a moment? I'm on my way to the opera. May I stay a few minutes?"

She nodded, not yet sufficiently composed to talk very much.

He glanced about him for a place to lay coat and hat; then slipping out of the soft fur, disclosed himself in evening dress.

She had dropped into the arm-chair by the radiator; and, as he came forward, stripping off his white gloves, suddenly she became conscious of her bare, slippered feet and drew them under the edges of her negligée.

"I was not expecting anybody,—" she began, and checked herself. Certainly she did not care to rise, now, and pass before him in search of more suitable clothing. Therefore the less said the better.

He had found a rather shaky chair, and had drawn it up in front of the radiator.

"This is very jolly," he said. "Do you realise that this is our third encounter?"

"Yes."

"It really begins to look inevitable, doesn't it?"

She smiled.

"Three times, you know, is usually considered significant," he added laughingly. "It doesn't dismay you, does it?"

She laughed, resting her cheek against the upholstered wing of her chair and looked at him with shy but undisguised pleasure.

"You haven't changed a single bit, Athalie," he declared.

"No, I haven't changed."

"Do you remember our last meeting — on the Elevated?"

"Yes."

"Lord!" he said; "that was four years ago. Do you realise it?"

"Yes."

A slight colour grew on his cheeks.

"I *was* a piker, wasn't I?"

After a moment, looking down at her idly clasped hands lying on her knees: "I hoped you would come," she said gravely.

"I wanted to. I don't suppose you'll believe that; but I did. . . . I don't know how it happened that I didn't make good. There were so many things to do, all sorts of engagements,— and the summer vacation seemed ended before I could understand that it had begun"— He scowled in retrospection, and she watched

his expression out of her dark blue eyes — clear, engaging eyes, sweet as a child's.

"That's no excuse," he concluded. "I should have kept my word to you — and I really wanted to. . . . And I was not quite such a piker as you thought me."

"I didn't think that of you, C. Bailey, Junior."

"You must have!"

"I didn't."

"That's because you're so decent, but it makes my infamy the blacker. . . . Anyway I *did* write you and *did* send you the strap-watch. I sent both to Fifty-fourth Street. The Dead Letter Office returned them to me." . . . He drew from his inner pocket a letter and a packet. "Here they are."

She sat up slowly and very slowly took the letter from his hand.

"Four years old," he commented. "Isn't that the limit?" And he began to tear the sealed paper from the packet.

"What a shame," he went on contritely, "that you wore that old gun-metal watch of mine so long. I was mortified when I saw it on your wrist that day —"

"I wear it still," she said with a smile.

"Nonsense!" he glanced at her bare wrist and laughed.

"I *do*," she insisted. "It is only because I have just bathed and am prepared for the night that I am not wearing it now."

He looked up, incredulous, then his expression changed subtly.

"Is that so?" he asked.

But the hint of seriousness confused her and she merely nodded.

He had freed the case from the sealed paper and now he laid it on her knees, saying: "Thank the Lord I'm not such a piker now as I was, anyway. I hope you'll wear it, Athalie, and fire that other affair out of your back window."

"There is no back window," she said, raising her charming eyes to his,—"there's only an air-shaft. . . . Am I to open it?—I mean this case?"

"It is yours."

She opened it daintily.

"Oh, C. Bailey, Junior!" she said very gently. "You mustn't do this!"

"Why?"

"It's *too* beautiful. Isn't it?"

"Nonsense, Athalie. Here, I'll wind it and set it for you. This is how it works—" pulling out the jewelled lever and setting it by the tin alarm-clock on the mantel. Then he wound it, unclasped the woven gold wrist-band, took her reluctant hand, and, clasping the jewel over her wrist, snapped the catch.

For a few moments her fair head remained bent as she gazed in silence at the tiny moving hands. Then, looking up:

"Thank you, C. Bailey, Junior," she said, a little solemnly perhaps.

He laughed, somewhat conscious of the slight constraint: "You're welcome, Athalie. Do you really like it?"

"It is wonderfully beautiful."

"Then I'm perfectly happy and contented — or I will be when you read that letter and admit I'm not as much of a piker as I seemed."

She laughed and coloured: "I never thought that of you. I only — missed you."

"Really?"

"Yes," she said innocently.

For a second he looked rather grave, then again, conscious of his own constraint, spoke gaily, lightly:

"You certainly are the real thing in friendship. You are far too generous to me."

She said: "Incidents are not frequent enough in my life to leave me unimpressed. I never knew any other boy of your sort. I suppose that is why I never forgot you."

Her simplicity pricked the iridescent and growing bubble of his vanity, and he laughed, discountenanced by her direct explanation of how memory chanced to retain him. But it did not occur to him to ask himself how it happened that, in all these years, and in a life so happily varied, so delightfully crowded as his own had always been, he had never entirely forgotten her.

"I wish you'd open that letter and read it," he said. "It's my credential. Date and postmark plead for me."

But she had other plans for its unsealing and its perusal, and said so.

"Aren't you going to read it, Athalie?"

"Yes — when you go."

"Why?"

"Because — it will make your visit seem a little longer," she said frankly.

"Athalie, are you really glad to see me?"

She looked up as though he were jesting, and caught in his eye another gleam of that sudden seriousness which had already slightly confused her. For a moment only, both felt the least sense of constraint, then the instinct that had forbidden her to admit any significance in his seriousness, parted her lips with that engaging smile which he had begun to know so well, and to await with an expectancy that approached fascination.

"Peach turnovers," she said. "Do you remember? If I had not been glad to see you in those days I would not have gone into the kitchen to bring you one. . . . And I have already told you that I am unchanged. . . . Wait! I am changed. . . . I am very much wealthier." And she laughed her delicious, unembarrassed laugh of a child.

He laughed, too, then shot a glance around the shabby room.

"What are you doing, Athalie?" he asked lightly.

"The same."

"I remember you told me. You are stenographer and typist."

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I am with Wahlbaum, Grossman & Co."

"Are they decent to you?"

"Very."

He thought a moment, hesitated, appeared as though

about to speak, then seemed to reject the idea whatever it might have been.

"You live with your sisters, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

He planted his elbows on his knees and leaned forward, his head on his hands, apparently buried in thought.

After a little while: "C. Bailey, Junior," she ventured, "you must not let me keep you too long."

"What?" He lifted his head.

"You are on your way to the opera, aren't you?"

"Am I? That's so. . . . I'd rather stay here if you'll let me."

"But the *opera!*" she protested with emphasis.

"What do I care for the opera?"

"Don't you?"

He laughed: "No; do you?"

"I'm mad about it."

Still laughing he said: "Then, in my place, *you* wouldn't give up the opera for *me*, would you, Athalie?"

She started to say "No!" very decidedly; but checked herself. Then, deliberately honest:

"If," she began, "I were going to the opera, and you came in here — after four years of not seeing you — and if I had to choose — I don't believe I'd go to the opera. But it would be a dreadful wrench, C. Bailey, Junior!"

"It's no wrench to me."

"Because you often go."

"Because, even if I seldom went there could be no

question of choice between the opera and Athalie Greensleeve."

"C. Bailey, Junior, you are not honest."

"Yes, I am. Why do you say so?"

"I judge by past performances," she said, her humorous eyes on him.

"Are you going to throw past performances in my face every time I come to see you?"

"Are you coming again?"

"That isn't generous of you, Athalie —"

"I really mean it," said the girl. "Are you?"

"Coming here? Of course I am if you'll let me!"

The last time he had said, "If you *want* me." Now it was modified to "If you'll *let* me,"— a development and a new footing to which neither were yet accustomed, perhaps not even conscious of.

"C. Bailey, Junior, do you want to come?"

"I do indeed. It is so bully of you to be nice to me after — everything. And it's so jolly to talk over — things — with you."

She leaned forward in her chair, her pretty hands joined between her knees.

"Please," she said, "don't say you'll come if you are not coming."

"But I am —"

"I know you said so twice before. . . . I don't mean to be horrid or to reproach you, but — I am going to tell you — I was disappointed — even a — a little — unhappy. And it — lasted — some time. . . . So, if you are not coming, tell me so now. . . . It is hard to wait — too long."

"Athalie," he said, completely surprised by the girl's frank avowal and by the unsuspected emotion in himself which was responding, "I am — I had no idea — I don't deserve your kindness to me — your loyalty —. I'm a — I'm a — a pup! That's what I am — an undeserving, ungrateful, irresponsible, and asinine pup! That's what all boys in college are — but it's no excuse for not keeping my word — for making you unhappy —"

"C. Bailey, Junior, you were just a boy. And I was a child. . . . I am still, in spite of my nineteen years — nearly twenty at that — not much different, not enough changed to know that I'm a woman. I feel exactly as I did toward you — not grown up,— or that you have grown up. . . . Only I know, somehow, I'd have a harder time of it now, if you tell me you'll come, and then —"

"I *will* come, Athalie! I *want* to," he said impetuously. "You're more interesting,— a lot jollier,— than any girl I know. I always suspected it, too — the bigger fool I to lose all that time we might have had together —"

She, surprised for a moment, lifted her pretty head and laughed outright, checking his somewhat impulsive monologue. And he looked at her, disturbed.

"I'm only laughing because you speak of all those years we might have had together, as though —" And suddenly she checked herself in her turn, on the brink of saying something that was not so funny after all.

Probably he understood what impulse had prompted

her to terminate abruptly both laughter and discourse, for he reddened and gazed rather fixedly at the radiator which was now clanking and clinking in a very noisy manner.

"You ought to have a fireplace and an open fire," he said. "It's the cosiest thing on earth — with a cat on the hearth and a big chair and a good book. . . . Athalie, do you remember that stove? And how I sat there in wet shooting clothes and stockinged feet?"

"Yes," she said, drawing her own bare ones further under her chair.

"Do you know what you looked like to me when you came in so silently, dressed in your red hood and cloak?"

"What did I look like?"

"A little fairy princess."

"*I?* In that ragged cloak?"

"*I* didn't see the rags. All I saw was your lithe little fairy figure and your yellow hair and your wonderful dark eyes in the ruddy light from the stove. I tell you, Athalie, I was enchanted."

"How odd! I never dreamed you thought that of me when I stood there looking at you, utterly lost in admiration —"

"Oh, come, Athalie!" he laughed; "you are getting back at me!"

"It's true. I thought you the most wonderful boy I had ever seen."

"Until I disillusioned you," he said.

"You never did, C. Bailey, Junior."

"What! Not when I proved a piker?"

But she only smiled into his amused and challenging eyes and slowly shook her head.

Once or twice, mechanically, he had slipped a flat gold cigarette case from his pocket, and then, mechanically still, had put it back. Not accustomed to modern men of his caste she had not paid much attention to the unconscious hint of habit. Now as he did it again it occurred to her to ask him why he did not smoke.

"May I?"

"Yes. I like it."

"Do you smoke?"

"No — now and then when I'm troubled."

"Is that often?" he asked lightly.

"Very seldom," she replied, amused; "and the proof is that I never smoked more than half a dozen cigarettes in all my life."

"Will you try one now?" he asked mischievously.

"I'm not in trouble, am I?"

"I don't know. *I* am."

"What troubles you, C. Bailey, Junior?" she asked, humorously.

"My disinclination to leave. And it's after eleven."

"If you never get into any more serious trouble than that," she said, "I shall not worry about you."

"Would you worry if I were in trouble?"

"Naturally."

"Why?"

"Why? Because you are my friend. Why shouldn't I worry?"

"Do you really take our friendship as seriously as that?"

"Don't *you*?"

He changed countenance, hesitated, flicked the ashes from his cigarette. Suddenly he looked her straight in the face:

"Yes. I *do* take it seriously," he said in a voice so quietly and perhaps unnecessarily emphatic that, for a few moments, she found nothing to say in response.

Then, smilingly: "I am glad you look at it that way. It means that you will come back some day."

"I will come to-morrow if you'll let me."

Which left her surprised and silent but not at all disquieted.

"Shall I, 'Athalie?"

"Yes — if you wish."

"Why not?" he said with more unnecessary emphasis and as though addressing himself, and perhaps others not present. "I see no reason why I shouldn't if you'll let me. Do you?"

"No."

"May I take you to dinner and to the theatre?"

A quick glow shot through her, leaving a sort of whispering confusion in her brain which seemed full of distant voices.

"Yes, I'd like to go with you."

"That's fine! And we'll have supper afterward."

She smiled at him through the ringing confusion in her brain.

"Do you mind taking supper with me after the play?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"Anywhere — with you, C. Bailey, Junior."

Things began to seem to her a trifle unreal; she saw him a little vaguely: vaguely, too, she was conscious that to whatever she said he was responding with something more subtly vital than mere words. Faintly within her the instinct stirred to ignore, to repress something in him — in herself — she was not clear about just what she ought to repress, or which of them harboured it.

One thing confused and disturbed her; his tongue was running loose, planning all sorts of future pleasures for them both together, confidently, with an enthusiasm which, somehow, seemed to leave her unresponsive.

"Please don't," she said.

"What, Athalie?"

"Make so many promises — plans. I — am afraid of promises."

He turned very red: "What on earth have I done to you!"

"Nothing — yet."

"Yes I have! I once made you unhappy; I made you distrust me —"

"No: — that is all over now. Only — if it happened again — I should really — miss you — very much — C. Bailey, Junior. . . . So don't promise me too much — now. . . . Promise a little — each time you come — if you care to."

In the silence that grew between them the alarm went

off with a startling clangour that brought them both to their feet.

It was midnight.

"I set it to wake myself before my sisters came in," she explained with a smile. "I usually have something prepared for them to eat when they've been out."

"I suppose they do the same for you," he said, looking at her rather steadily.

"I don't go out in the evening."

"You do sometimes."

"Very seldom. . . . Do you know, C. Bailey, Junior, I have never been out in the evening with a man?"

"What?"

"Never."

"Why?"

"I suppose," she admitted with habitual honesty, "it's because I don't know any men with whom I'd care to be seen in the evening. I don't like ordinary people."

"How about me?" he asked, laughing.

She merely smiled.

CHAPTER VII

DORIS came in about midnight, her coat and hat plastered with sleet, her shoes soaking. She looked rather forlornly at the bowl of hot milk and crackers which Athalie brought from the kitchenette.

"I'd give next week's salary for a steak," she said, taking the bowl and warming her chilled hands on it.

"You know what meat costs," said Athalie. "I'd give it to you for supper if I could."

Doris seated herself by the radiator; Athalie knelt and drew off the wet shoes, unbuttoned the garters and rolled the stockings from the icy feet.

"I had another chance to-night: they were college boys: some of the girls went —" remarked Doris disjointedly, forcing herself to eat the crackers and milk because it was hot, and snuggling into the knitted slippers which Athalie brought. After a moment or two she lifted her pretty, impudent face and sniffed inquiringly.

"*Who's* been smoking? You?"

"No."

"Who? Genevieve?"

"No. Who do you suppose called?"

"Search *me*."

"C. Bailey, Junior!"

Doris looked blank, then: "Oh, that boy you had an affair with about a hundred years ago?"

"That same boy," said Athalie, smiling.

"He'll come again next century I suppose — like a comet," shrugged Doris, nestling closer to the radiator.

Athalie said nothing; her sister slowly stirred the crackers in the milk and from time to time took a spoonful.

"Next time," she said presently, "I shall go out to supper when an attractive man asks me. I know how to take care of myself — and the supper, too."

Athalie started to say something, and stopped. Perhaps she remembered C. Bailey, Jr., and that she had promised to dine and sup with him, "anywhere."

She said in a low voice: "It's all right, I suppose, if you know the man."

"I don't care whether I know him or not as long as it's a good restaurant."

"Don't talk that way, Doris!"

"Why not? It's true."

There was a silence. Doris set aside the empty bowl, yawned, looked at the clock, yawned again.

"This is too late for Catharine," she said, drowsily.

"I know it is. Who are the people she's with?"

"Genevieve Hunting — I don't know the men: — some of Genevieve's friends."

"I hope it's nobody from Winton's."

There had been in the Greensleeve family, a tacit understanding that it was not the thing to accept social attentions from anybody connected with the firm which employed them. Winton, the male milliner and gown

designer, usually let his models alone, being in perpetual dread of his wife; but one of the unhealthy looking sons had become a nuisance to the girls employed there. Recently he had annoyed Catharine, and the girl was afraid she might have to lunch with him or lose her position.

Doris yawned again, then shivered.

"Go to bed, ducky," said Athalie. "I'll wait up for Catharine."

So Doris took herself off to bed and Athalie sank into the shabby arm-chair by the radiator to wait for her other sister.

It was two o'clock when she came in, flushed, vague-eyed, a rather silly and fixed smile on her doll-like face. Athalie, on the verge of sleep, rose from her chair, rubbing her eyes:

"What on earth, Catharine —"

"We had supper,— that's why I'm late. . . . I've got to have a dinner gown I tell you. Genevieve's is the smartest thing —"

"Where did you go?"

"To the Regina. I didn't want to — dressed this way but Cecil Reeve said —"

"Who?"

"Cecil — Mr. Reeve — one of Genevieve's friends — the man who was so crazy to meet me —"

"Oh! Who else was there?" asked Athalie drily.

"A Mr. Ferris — Harry Ferris they call him. He's quite mad about Genevieve —"

"Why did you drink anything?"

"I?"

"You did, didn't you?"

"I had a glass of champagne."

"What else?"

"Nothing — except something pink in a glass — before we sat down to supper. . . . And something violet coloured, afterward."

"Your breath is dreadful; do you realise it?"

Catharine seemed surprised, then her eyes wandered vaguely, drowsily, and she laid her gloved hand on Athalie's arm as though to steady herself.

"What sort of man is your new friend, Cecil Reeve?" inquired Athalie.

"He's nice — a gentleman. And they were so amusing; — we laughed so much. . . . I told him he might call. . . . He's really all right, Athalie —"

"And Mr. Ferris?"

"Well — I don't know about him; he's Genevieve's friend; — I don't know him so well. . . . But of course he's all right — a gentleman —"

"That's the trouble," said Athalie in a low voice.

"What is the trouble?"

"These friends of yours — and of Doris, and of mine . . . they're gentlemen. . . . And that is why we find them agreeable, socially. . . . But when they desire social amusement they know where to find it."

"Where?"

"Where girls who work for a living are unknown. Where they never are asked, never go, never are expected to go. But that is where such men are asked, where such men are expected; and it is where they go for social diversion — not to the Regina with two of

Winton's models, nor to the Café Arabesque with an Egyptian Garden chorus girl, nor —" she hesitated, flushed, and was silent, staring mentally at the image of C. Bailey, Jr., which her logic and philosophy had inevitably evoked.

"Then, what is a business girl to do?" asked Catharine, vaguely.

Athalie shook her golden head, slowly: "Don't ask me."

Catharine said, still more vaguely: "She must do something — pleasant — before she's too old and sick to — to care what happens."

"I know it. . . . Men, of that kind, *are* pleasant. . . . I don't see why we shouldn't go out with them. It's all the chance we have. Or will ever have. . . . I've thought it over. I don't see that it helps for us to resent their sisters and mothers and friends. Such women would never permit us to know them. The nearest we can get to them is to know their sons."

"I don't want to know them —"

"Yes, you do. Be honest, Catharine. Every girl does. And really I believe if the choice were offered a business girl, she would rather know the mothers and sisters than the sons."

"There's no use thinking about it," said Catharine.

"No, there is no use . . . And so I don't see any harm in being friends with their sons. . . . It will hurt at times — humiliate us — maybe embitter us. . . . But it's that or nothing."

"We needn't be silly about their sons."

Athalie opened her dark blue eyes, then laughed confidently: "Oh, as for anything like *that!* I should hope not. We three ought to know *something* by this time."

"I should think so," murmured Catharine; and her warm, wine-scented breath fell on Athalie's cheek.

CHAPTER VIII

BEFORE February had ended C. Bailey, Jr., and Athalie Greensleeve had been to more than one play, had dined and supped together more than once at the Regina.

The magnificence of the most fashionable restaurant in town had thrilled and enchanted Athalie. At close range for the first time she had an opportunity to inspect the rich, the fashionable, and the great. As for celebrities, they seemed to be merely a by-product of the gay, animated, beautifully gowned throngs: people she had heard of, people more important still of whom she had never heard, people important only to themselves of whom nobody had ever heard thronged the great rococo rooms. The best hotel orchestra in America played there; the loveliest flowers, the most magnificent jewels, the most celebrated cuisine in the entire Republic — all were there for Athalie Greensleeve to wonder at and to enjoy. There were other things for her to wonder at, too,— the seemingly exhaustless list of C. Bailey, Jr.'s, acquaintances; for he was always nodding to somebody or returning salutes wherever they were, in the theatre, or the street, in his little limousine car, at restaurants. Men sometimes came up and spoke and were presented to Athalie: women, never.

But although she was very happy after her first evening out with C. Bailey, Jr., she realised that a serious inroad upon her savings was absolutely necessary if she were to continue her maiden's progress with this enchanting young man. Clothing of a very different species than any she had ever permitted herself was now becoming a necessity. She made the inroad. It was worth while if only to see his surprise and his naïve pride in her.

And truly the girl was very lovely in the few luxuries she ventured to acquire — so lovely, indeed, that many heads turned and many eyes followed her calm and graceful progress in theatre aisle, amid thronged tables, on the Avenue, anywhere and everywhere she moved along the path of life now already in flowery bloom for her.

And beside her, eager, happy, flattered, walked C. Bailey, Jr., very conscious that he was being envied; very proud of the beautiful young girl with whom he was so constantly identifying himself, and who, very obviously, was doing him honour.

Of his gratified and flattered self-esteem the girl was unconscious; that he was really happy with her, proud of her appearance, kind to her beyond reason and even beyond propriety perhaps,— invariably courteous and considerate, she was vividly aware. And it made her intensely happy to know that she gave him pleasure and to accept it from him.

It *was* pleasure to Cl[illegible]; but not entirely unmitigated. His father asked him once or twice who the girl was of whom "people" were talking; and when his son

"C. Bailey, Jr. and Athalie Greensleeve . . . had supped together more than once at the Regina."

own caste who played about with a woman for whose existence nobody who was anybody could account.

"The daughter of a Long Island road-house keeper! Why, Clive! where is your sense of fitness! Men don't do that sort of thing any more!"

"What sort of thing, mother?"

"What you are doing."

"What am I doing?"

"Parading a very conspicuous young woman about town."

"If you saw her in somebody's drawing-room you'd merely think her beautiful and well-bred."

"Clive! Will you please awake from that silly dream?"

"That's the truth, mother. And if she spoke it would merely confirm the impression. You won't believe it but it's true."

"That's absurd, Clive! She may not be uneducated but she certainly cannot be either cultivated or well-bred."

"She is cultivating herself."

"Then for goodness' sake let her do it! It's praiseworthy and commendable for a working girl to try to better herself. But it doesn't concern you."

"Why not? If a business girl does better herself and fit herself for a better social environment, it seems to me her labour is in vain if people within the desired environment snub her."

"What kind of argument is that? Socialistic? I merely know it is unbaked. What theory is it, dear?"

"Beside her, eager, happy, flattered, walked C. Bailey, Jr., very conscious that he was being envied."

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"I don't know what it is. It seems reasonable to me, mother."

"Clive, are you trying to make yourself sentimentalise over that Greensleeve woman?"

"I told you that I am not in love with her; nor is she with me. It's an agreeable and happy comradeship; that's all."

"People think it something more," retorted his mother, curtly.

"That's their fault, not Athalie's and not mine."

"Then, why do you go about with her? *Why?* You know girls enough, don't you?"

"Plenty. They resemble one another to the verge of monotony."

"Is that the way you regard the charming, well-born, well-bred, clever, cultivated girls of your own circle, whose parents were the friends of your parents?"

"Oh, mother, I like them of course. . . . But there's something about a business girl — a girl in the making — that is more amusing, more companionable, more interesting. A business girl seems to wear better. She's better worth talking to, listening to,— it's better fun to go about with her, see things with her, discuss things —"

"What on earth are you talking about! It's perfect babble; it's nonsense! If you really believe you have a penchant for sturdy and rather grubby worthiness unadorned you are mistaken. The inclination you have is merely for a pretty face and figure. I know you. If I don't, who does! You're rather a fastidious

young man, even finicky, and very, very much accustomed to the best and only the best. Don't talk to me about your disinterested admiration for a working girl. You haven't anything in common with her, and you never could have. And you'd better be very careful not to make a fool of yourself."

"How?"

"As all men are likely to do at your callow age."

"Fall in love with her?"

"You can call it that. The result is always deplorable. And if she's a smart, selfish, and unscrupulous girl, the result may be more deplorable still, as far as we all are concerned. What is the need of my saying this? You are grown; you know it already. Up to the present time you've kept fastidiously clear of such entanglements. You say you have, and your father and I believe you. So what is the use of beginning now,— creating an unfortunate impression in your own set, spending your time with such a girl as this Greensleeve girl —"

"Mother," he said, "you're going about this matter in the wrong way. I am not in love with Athalie Greensleeve. But there is no girl I like better, none perhaps I like quite as well. Let me alone. There's no sentiment between her and me so far. There won't be any — unless you and other people begin to drive us toward each other. I don't want you to do that. Don't interfere. Let us alone. We're having a good time,— a perfectly natural, wholesome, happy time together."

"'I *like* her,' repeated Clive, Jr., a trifle annoyed."

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"What is it leading to?" demanded his mother impatiently.

"To nothing except more good times. That's absolutely all. That's all that good times lead to where any of the girls you approve of are concerned — not to sentiment, not to love, merely to more good times. Why on earth can't people understand that even if the girl happens to be earning her own living?"

"People don't understand. That is the truth, and you can't alter it, Clive. The girl's reputation will always suffer. And that's where you ought to show yourself generous."

"What?"

"If you really like and respect her."

"How am I to show myself generous, as you put it?"

"By keeping away from her."

"Because people gossip?"

"Because," said his mother sharply, "they'll think the girl is your mistress if you continue to decorate public resorts with her."

"Would — *you* think so, mother?"

"No. You happen to be my son. And you're truthful. Otherwise I'd think so."

"You would?"

"Certainly."

"That's rotten," he said, slowly.

"Oh, Clive, don't be a fool. You can't do what you're doing without arousing suspicion everywhere — from a village sewing-circle to the smartest gathering on Manhattan Island! You know it."

"I have never thought about it."

"Then think of it now. Whether it's rotten, as you say, or not, it's so. It's one of the folk-ways of the human species. And if it is, merely saying it's rotten can't alter it."

Mrs. Bailey's car was at the door; Clive took the great sable coat from the maid who brought it and slipped it over the handsome afternoon gown that his handsome mother wore.

For a moment he stood, looking at her almost curiously — at the brilliant black eyes, the clear smooth olive skin still youthful enough to be attractive, at the red lips, mostly nature's hue, at the cheeks where the delicate carmine flush was still mostly nature's.

He said: "You have so much, mother. . . . It seems strange you should not be more generous to a girl you have never seen."

His handsome, capable, and experienced mother gazed at him out of friendly and amused eyes from which delusion had long since fled. And that is where she fell short, for delusion is the offspring of imagination; and without imagination no intelligence is complete. She said: "I can be generous with any woman except where my son concerns himself with her. Where anybody else's son is involved I could be generous to any girl, even —" she smiled her brilliant smile —"even perhaps not too maliciously generous. But the situation in your case doesn't appeal to me as humorous. Keep away from her, Clive; it's easier than ultimately to run away from her."

CHAPTER IX

THE course of irresponsible amusement which C. Bailey, Jr., continued to pursue at intervals with the fair scion of the house — road-house — of Greensleeve, did not run as smoothly as it might have, and was not unmixed with carping reflections and sordid care on his part, and with an increasing number of interruptions, admonitions, and warnings on the part of his mother.

That pretty lady, flint-hardened in the igneous social lava-pot, continued to hear disquieting tales of her son's doings. They came to her right and left, from dance and card-table, opera-box and supper party, tea and bazaar and fashionable reception.

One grim-visaged old harridan of whom Manhattan stood in fawning fear, bluntly informed her that she'd better look out for her boy if she didn't want to become a grandmother.

Which infuriated and terrified Mrs. Bailey and set her thinking with all the implacable concentration of which she was capable.

So far in life she had accomplished whatever she set out to do. . . . And of all things on earth she dreaded most to become a grandmother of any description whatever.

But between Athalie and Clive, if there had been any doubts concerning the propriety or expediency of their companionship neither he nor she had, so far, expressed them.

Their comradeship, in fact, had now become an intimacy — the sort that permits long silences without excuse or embarrassment on either side. She continued to charm and surprise him; and to discover, daily, in him new traits to admire in a character which perhaps he did not really possess.

In this girl he seemed to find an infinite variety. Moods, impulsive or deliberate, and capricious or logical, continued to stimulate his interest in her every time they met. On no two days was she exactly the same — or so he seemed to think. And yet her basic qualities were, it appeared to him, characteristic and unvarying,— directness, loyalty, generosity, freedom from ulterior motive and a gay confidence in a world which, for the first time in her life, she had begun to find unexpectedly exciting.

They had been one evening to a musical comedy which by some fortunate chance was well written, well sung, and well done. And they were in excellent spirits as they left the theatre and stood waiting for his small limousine car, she in her pretty furs held close to her throat, humming under her breath a refrain from the delightful finale, he smoking a cigarette and watching the numbers being flashed for the long line of carriages and motors which moved up continually through the lamp-lit darkness.

"Athalie," he said, "suppose we side-step the Re-

gina and try Broadway. Are you in the humour for it?"

She laughed and her eyes sparkled in the electric glow: "Are you, Clive?"

"Yes, I am. I feel very devilish."

"So do I,— devilishly hungry."

"That's fine. Where shall we go?"

"The Café Arabesque? . . . The name sounds exciting."

"All right—" as his car drew up and the gold-capped porter opened the door;— so he directed his chauffeur to drive them to the Café Arabesque.

"If you don't like it," he added to Athalie, drawing the fur robe over her knees and his, "we can go somewhere else."

"That's very nice of you. I don't have to suffer for my mistakes."

"Nobody ever ought to suffer for mistakes because nobody would ever make mistakes on purpose," he said, laughing.

"Such a delightful philosophy! Please remind me of it when I'm in agony over something I'm sorry I did."

"I'm afraid you'll have to remind me too," he said, still laughing. "Is it a bargain?"

"Certainly."

The car stopped; he sprang out and aided her to the icy sidewalk.

"I don't think I ever saw you as pretty as you are to-night," he whispered, slipping his arm under hers.

"*Are* you really growing more beautiful or do I merely think so?"

"I don't know," she said, happily; "I'll tell you a secret, shall I?"

He inclined his ear toward her, and she said in a laughing whisper: "Clive, I *feel* beautiful to-night. Do you know how it feels to feel beautiful?"

"Not personally," he admitted; and they separated still laughing like two children, the focus of sympathetic, amused, or envious glances from the brilliantly dressed throng clustering at the two cloak rooms.

She came to him presently where he was waiting, and, instinctively the groups around the doors made a lane for the fair young girl who came forward with the ghost of a smile on her lips as though entirely unconscious of herself and of everybody except the man who moved out to meet her.

"It's true," he murmured; "you *are* the most beautiful thing in this beauty-ridden town."

"You'll spoil me, Clive."

"Is that possible?"

"I don't know. Don't try. There is a great deal in me that has never been disturbed, never been brought out. Maybe much of it is evil," she added lightly.

He turned; she met his eyes half seriously, half mockingly, and they laughed. But what she had said so lightly in jest remained for a few moments in his mind to occupy and slightly trouble it.

From their table beside the bronze-railed gallery, they could overlook the main floor where a wide lane

for dancing had been cleared and marked out with crimson-tasselled ropes of silk.

A noisy orchestra played imbecile dance music, and a number of male and female imbeciles took advantage of it to exercise the only portions of their anatomy in which any trace of intellect had ever lodged.

Athalie, resting one dimpled elbow on the velvet cushioned rail, watched the dancers for a while, then her unamused and almost expressionless gaze swept the tables below with a leisurely absence of interest which might have been mistaken for insolence — and envied as such by a servile world which secretly adores it.

"Well, Lady Greensleeves?" he said, watching her.

"Some remarkable Poiret and Lucille gowns, Clive . . . And a great deal of paint." She remained a moment in the same attitude — leisurely inspecting the throng below, then turned to him, her calm preoccupation changing to a shyly engaging smile.

"Are you still of the same mind concerning my personal attractiveness?"

"I *have* spoiled you!" he concluded, pretending chagrin.

"Is that spoiling me — to hear you say you approve of me?"

"Of course not, you dear girl! Nothing could ever spoil you."

She lifted her Clover Club, looking across the frosty glass at him; and the usual rite was silently completed. They were hungry; her appetite was always a natural and healthy one, and his sometimes matched it, as happened that night.

"Now, this is wonderful," he said, lighting a cigarette between courses and leaning forward, elbows on the cloth, and his hands clasped under his chin; "a good show, a good dinner, and good company. What surfeited monarch could ask more?"

"Why mention the company last, Clive?"

"I've certainly spoiled you," he said with a groan; "you've tasted adulation; you prefer it to your dinner."

"The question is do *you* prefer my company to the dinner and the show? *Do* you! If so why mention me last in the catalogue of your blessings?"

"I always mention you last in my prayers — so that whoever listens will more easily remember," he said gaily.

The laughter still made the dark blue eyes brilliant but they grew more serious when she said: "You don't really ever *pray* for me, Clive. Do you?"

"Yes. Why not?"

The smile faded in her eyes and in his.

"I didn't know you prayed at all," she remarked, looking down at her wine glass.

"It's one of those things I happen to do," he said with a slight shrug.

They mused for a while in silence, her mind pursuing its trend back to childhood, his idly considering the subject of prayer and wondering whether the habit had become too mechanical with him, or whether his less selfish petitions might possibly carry to the Source of All Things.

Then having drifted clear of this nebulous zone of

thought, and coffee having been served, they came back to earth and to each other with slight smiles of recognition — delicate salutes acknowledging each other's presence and paramount importance in a world which was going very gaily.

They discussed the play; she hummed snatches of its melodies below her breath at intervals, her dark blue eyes always fixed on him and her ears listening to him alone. Particularly now; for his mood had changed and he was drifting back toward something she had said earlier in the evening — something about her own possible capacity for good and evil. It was a question, only partly serious; and she responded in the same vein:

"How should I know what capabilities I possess? Of course I have capabilities. No doubt, dormant within me lies every besetting sin, every human failing. Perhaps also the cardinal, corresponding, and antidotic virtues to all of these."

"I suppose," he said, "every sin has its antithesis. It's like a chess board — the human mind — with the black men ranged on one side and the white on the other, ready to move, to advance, skirmish, threaten, manœuvre, attack, and check each other, and the intervening squares represent the checkered battlefield of contending desires."

The simile striking her as original and clever, she made him a pretty compliment. She was very young in her affections.

"If," she nodded, "a sin, represented by a black piece, dares to stir or intrude or threaten, then there is

always the better thought, represented by a white piece, ready to block and check the black one. Is that it?"

"Exactly," he said, secretly well pleased with himself. And as for Athalie, she admired his elastic and eloquent imagination beyond words.

"Do you know," she said, "you have never yet told me anything about your business. Is it all right for me to ask, Clive?"

"Certainly. It's real estate — Bailey, Reeve, and Willis. Willis is dead, Reeve out of it, and my father and I are the whole show."

"Reeve?" she repeated, interested.

"Yes, he lives in Paris, permanently. He has a son here, in the banking business."

"Cecil Reeve?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"No. My sister Catharine does."

Clive seemed interested and curious: "Cecil Reeve and I were at Harvard together. I haven't seen much of him since."

"What sort is he, Clive?"

"Nice — Oh, very nice. A good sport; — a good deal of a sport. . . . Which sister did you say?"

"Catharine."

"That's the cunning little one with the baby stare and brown curls?"

"Yes."

There was a silence. Clive sat absently fidgeting with his glass, and Athalie watched him. Presently without looking up he said: "Yes, Cecil Reeve is a very decent sport. . . . Rather gay. Good-looking

chap. Nice sort. . . . But rather a sport, you know."

The girl nodded.

"Catharine mustn't believe all he says," he added with a laugh. "Cecil has a way — I'm not knocking him, you understand — but a young — inexperienced girl — might take him a little bit too seriously . . . Of course your sister wouldn't."

"No, I don't think so. . . . Are *you* that way, too?"

He raised his eyes: "Do you think I am, Athalie?"

"No. . . . But I can't help wondering — a little uneasily at times — how you can find me as — as companionable as you say you do. . . . I can't help wondering how long it will last."

"It will last as long as you do."

"But you are sure to find me out sooner or later, Clive."

"Find you out?"

"Yes — discover my limits, exhaust my capacity for entertaining you, extract the last atom of amusement out of me. And — what *then?*"

"Athalie! What nonsense!"

"Is it?"

"Certainly it's nonsense. How can I possibly tire of such a girl as you? I scarcely even know you yet. I don't begin to know you. Why you are a perfectly unexplored, undiscovered girl to me, yet!"

"Am I?" she asked, laughing. "I supposed you had discovered about all there is to me."

He shook his head, looking at her curiously perplexed: "Every time we meet you are different. You always have interesting views on any subject.

You stimulate my imagination. How could I tire?

"Besides, somehow I am always aware of reserved and hidden forces in you — of a character which I only partly know and admire — capabilities, capacities of which I am ignorant except that, intuitively, I seem to know they are part of you."

"Am I as complex as that to you?"

"Sometimes," he admitted. "You are just now for example. But usually you are only a wonderfully interesting and charming girl who brings out the best side of me and keeps me amused and happy every moment that I am with you."

"There really is not much more to me than that," she said in a low voice. "You sum me up — a gay source of amusement: nothing more."

"Athalie, you know you are more vital than that to me."

"No, I don't know it."

"You do! You know it in your own heart. You know that it is a straight, clean, ardent friendship that inspires me and —" she looked up, serious, and very quiet.

—"You know," he continued impulsively, "that it is not only your beauty, your loveliness and grace and that inexplicable charm you seem to radiate, that brings me to seek you every time that I have a moment to do so.

"Why, if it were that alone, it would all have been merely a matter of sentiment. Have I ever been sentimental with you?"

"No."

"Have I ever made love to you?"

She did not reply. Her eyes were fixed on her glass.

"Have I, Athalie?" he repeated.

"No, Clive," she said gently.

"Well then; is there not on my part a very deep, solidly founded, and vital friendship for you? Is there not a —"

"Don't let's talk about it," she interrupted in a low voice. "You always make me very happy; you say I please you — interest and amuse you. That is enough — more than enough — more than I ever hoped or asked —"

"I said you make me happy; — happier than I have ever been," he explained with emphasis. "Do you suppose for a moment that your regard for me is warmer, deeper, more enduring, than is mine for you? Do you, Athalie?"

She lifted her eyes to his. But she had nothing more to say on the subject.

However, he began to insist,— a little impatiently,— on a direct answer. And finally she said:

"Clive, you came into a rather empty life when you came into mine. Judge how completely you have filled it. . . . And what it would be if you went out of it. Your own life has always been full. If I should disappear from it —" she ceased.

The quiet, accentless, almost listless dignity of the words surprised and impressed him for a moment; then the reaction came in a faint glow through every vein and a sudden impulse to respond to her with an assurance of devotion a little out of key with the somewhat

stately and reserved measure of their duet called friendship.

"You also fill my life," he said. "You give me what I never had — an intimacy and an understanding that satisfies. Had I my way I would be with you all the time. No other woman interests me as you do. There *is* no other woman."

"Oh, Clive! And all the charming people you know —"

"I know many. None like you, Athalie."

"That is very sweet of you. . . . I'm trying to believe it. . . . I want to. . . . There are many days to fill in when I am not with you. To fill them with such a belief would be to shorten them. . . . I don't know. I often wonder where you are; what you are doing; with what stately and beautiful creature you are talking, laughing, walking, dancing"— She shrugged her shoulders and gazed down at the dancers below. "The days are very long, sometimes," she added, half to herself.

When again, calmly, she turned to him there was an odd expression on his face, and the next second he reddened and shifted his gaze. Neither spoke for a few moments.

Presently she began to draw on her gloves, but he continued staring into space, not noticing her, and finally she bent forward and rested her slim gloved fingers on his hand, lightly, interrogatively.

"Yes; all right," he muttered.

"I have to go to business in the morning," she pleaded.

He turned almost impatiently:

"If I had my way you wouldn't go to business at all."

"If I had my way I wouldn't either," she rejoined, smilingly. But his youthful visage remained sober and flushed. And when they were seated in the limousine and the fur rug enveloped them both, he said abruptly:

"I'm getting tired of this business."

"What business, Clive?"

"Everything — the way you live — your inadequate quarters — your having to work all day long in that stuffy office, day after day, year after year!"

She said, surprised and perplexed: "But it can't be helped, Clive! I have to work."

"Why?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean — what good am I to you — what's the use of me, if I can't make things easier for you?"

"The *use* of you? Did you think I ever had any idea of using you?"

"But I want you to."

"How?" she asked, still uneasily perplexed, her eyes fixed on him.

But he had no definite idea, no plan fixed, nothing further to say on a subject that had so suddenly taken shape within his mind.

She asked him again for an explanation, but, receiving none, settled back thoughtfully in her furs. Only once did he break the silence.

"You know," he said indifferently, "that row of

houses, of which yours is one, belongs to me. I mean to me, personally."

"No, I didn't know it."

"Well it does. It's my own investment. . . . I've reduced rents — pending improvements."

She looked up at him.

"The rent of your apartment has been reduced fifty per cent.," he said carelessly; "so your rent is now paid until the new term begins next October."

"Clive! That is perfectly ridiculous!" she began, hotly; but he swung around, silencing her:

"Are you criticising my business methods?" he demanded.

"But that is too silly —"

"Will you mind your business!" he exclaimed, turning and taking her by both shoulders. She looked into his eyes, searching them in silence. Then:

"You're such a dear," she sighed; "why do you want to do a thing like that when my sisters and I can afford to pay the present rent. You are always doing such things, Clive; you have simply covered my dressing-table with silver; my bureau is full of pretty things, all gifts from you; you've given me the loveliest furniture of my own, and books and desk-set and — and everything. And now you are asking me to live rent-free. . . . And what have I to offer you in return?"

"The happiness of being with you now and then."

"Oh, Clive! You know that isn't very much to offer you. You know that our being together is far more to me than it is to you! I dare not even consider what

I'd do without you, now. You mould me, alter my thoughts, make me such a delightfully different girl, take entire charge and possession of me. . . . I don't want you to give me anything more — do anything more for me. . . . When you first began to give me beautiful things I didn't want to take them. Do you remember how awkward and shy I was — how I blushed. But I always end by doing everything you wish. . . . And it seems to give us both so much pleasure — all you do for me. . . . But please *don't* ask me to live without paying rent —"

The limousine drew up by the curb; Clive jumped out, aided Athalie to descend; and started for the grilled door where a light glimmered.

"This is not the house!" exclaimed Athalie, stopping short. "Where are you taking me, Clive?"

"Come on," he said, "I merely want to show you how I've had the new apartment house built —"

"But — it's too late! What an odd idea, taking me to inspect a new apartment house at two in the morning! Are you really serious?"

He nodded and rang. A sleepy night porter opened, recognised Clive, and touched his hat.

"Take us to the top, Mike," he said.

"Have you the keys, sorr?"

"Yes."

They entered the cage and it shot up to the top floor.

"Wait for us, Mike." . . . And to Athalie: "This is Michael Daly who will do anything you ask of him — won't you, Mike?"

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"I will that, sorr," said the big Irishman, tipping his hat to Athalie.

"But, Clive," she persisted, bewildered, still clinging to his arm, "I don't understand why—"

"Little goose, hush!" he replied, subduing the excitement in his voice and fitting the key into the door.

"One moment, Athalie," he added, "until I light up. Now!"

She entered the lighted hallway, walking on a soft green carpet, and turned, obeying the guiding pressure of his arm, into a big square room which sprang into brilliant illumination as he found the switch.

Green and gold were the hangings and prevailing colours; there were rugs, wide, comfortable chairs and lounges, bookcases, a picture or two in deep glowing colours, a baby-grand piano, and an open fire loaded for business.

"Is it done in good taste, Athalie?" he asked.

"It is charming. Is it yours, Clive?"

He laughed, slipped his arm under hers and led her along the hallway, opening door after door; and first she was invited to observe a very modern and glistening bathroom, then a bedroom all done in grey and rose with dainty white furniture and a white-bear rug beside the bed.

"Why this is a woman's room!" she exclaimed, puzzled.

He only laughed and drew her along the hall, showing her another bedroom with twin beds, a maid's room, a big clothes press, and finally, a completely furnished

kitchen, very modern with its porcelain baseboard and tiled walls.

"What do you think of all this, Athalie?" he insisted.

"Why it's exquisite, Clive. Whose is it?"

They walked back to the square living-room. He said, teasingly: "Do you remember, the first time I saw you after those four years,—that first evening when I came in to surprise you and found you sitting by the radiator — in your nightie, Athalie?"

"Yes," she said, laughing and blushing as she always did when he tormented her with that souvenir.

"And I said that you ought to have an open fire. And a cat. Didn't I?"

"Yes."

"There's your fire, Athalie;" he drew a match from his tiny flat gold case, struck it, and lighted the nest of pine shavings under the logs;—"and Michael has the cat when you want it."

He drew a big soft arm-chair to the mounting blaze. Athalie stood motionless, staring at the flames, then with a sudden, nervous gesture she sank down on the arm-chair and covered her face with her gloved hands.

He stood waiting, happy and excited, and finally he went over and touched her; and the girl caught his hand convulsively in both of hers and looked up at him with wet eyes.

"How can I do this, Clive? How *can* I?" she whispered.

"Any brother would do as much for his sister —"

"Oh, Clive! You are different! You are *more*

pride gratified, his boyish vanity satisfied. Always had the simplicity and candour of her quick and ardent gratitude corroborated and satisfied whatever was in him of youthful self-esteem. Everything about her seemed to minister to it — her attention in public places was undisguisedly for him alone; her beauty, her superb youth and health, the admiring envy of other people — all these flattered him.

Why should he not find pleasure in giving to such a girl as this? — giving without scruple — unscrupulous too, perhaps, concerning the effect his generosity might have on a cynical world which looked on out of wearied and incredulous eyes; unscrupulous, perhaps, concerning the effect his too lavish kindness might have on a young girl unaccustomed to men and the ways of men.

But there was no harm in him; he was very much self-assured of that. He had been too carefully brought up — far too carefully reared. And had people ventured to question him, and had they escaped alive his righteous violence, they would have learned that there really was not the remotest chance that his mother was in danger of becoming what she most dreaded in all the world.

The fire burned lower; they sat watching it together, her flushed cheek against the fur of his coat, his arm extended along the back of the chair behind her.

"Well," he said, "this has been another happy evening."

She stirred in assent, and he felt the lightest possible pressure against him.

"Are you contented, Athalie?"

"Yes."

After a moment he glanced at his watch. It was three o'clock. So he rose, placed the screen over the fireplace, and then came back to where she now stood, looking very intently at the opposite wall. And he turned to see what interested her. But there seemed to be nothing in particular just there.

"What are you staring at, little ghost-seer?" he asked, passing his hand under her arm; and stepped back, surprised, as she freed herself with a quick, nervous movement, looked at him, then averted her head.

"What is the matter, Athalie?" he inquired.

"Nothing . . . Don't touch me, Clive."

"No, of course not. . . . But what in the world —"

"Nothing. . . . Don't ask me." Presently he saw her very slowly move her head and look back at the empty corner of the room; and remain so, motionless for a moment. Then she turned with a sigh, came quietly to him; and he drew her hand through his arm.

"Of what were you thinking, Athalie?"

"Of nothing."

"Did you think you saw something over there?"

She was silent.

"What were you looking at?" he insisted.

"Nothing . . . I don't care to talk just now —"

"Tell me, Athalie!"

"No. . . . No, I don't want to, Clive —"

"I wish to know!"

"I can't — there is nothing to tell you —" she laid one hand on his coat, almost pleadingly, and looked up

at him out of eyes so dark that only the starry light in them betrayed that they were blue and not velvet black.

"That same thing has happened before," he said, looking at her, deeply perplexed. "Several times since I have known you the same expression has come into your face — as though you were looking at something which —"

"Please don't, Clive! —"

"— Which," he insisted, "I did not see. . . . *Could* not see!"

"Clive!"

He stared at her rather blankly: "Why don't you tell me?"

"I — can't!"

"*Is* there anything —"

"Don't! Don't!" she begged; but he went on, still staring at her:

"Is there any reason for you to — not to be frank with me? *Is* there, Athalie?"

"No; no reason. . . . I'll tell you . . . if you will understand. *Must* I tell you?"

"Yes."

Her head fell; she stood plucking nervously at his fur coat for a while in silence. Then:

"Clive, I — I *see clearly*."

"What?"

"I mean that I see a — a little more clearly than — some do. Do you understand?"

"No."

She sighed, stood twisting her white-gloved fingers, looking away from him.

"I am clairvoyant," she breathed.

"Athalie! *You?*"

She nodded.

For a second or two he stood silent in his astonishment; then, taking her hand, he drew her around facing the light, and she looked up at him in her lovely abashed way, yet so honestly, that anybody who could recognise truth and candour, could never have mistaken such eyes as hers.

"Who told you that you are clairvoyant?" he asked.

"My mother."

"Then —"

"It was not necessary for anybody to tell me that I saw — more clearly — than other people. . . . Mother knew it. . . . She merely explained and gave a name to this — this — whatever it is — this quality — this ability to see clearly. . . . That is all, Clive."

He was evidently trying to comprehend and digest what she had said. She watched him, saw surprise and incredulity in conflict with uneasiness and with the belief he could not avoid from lips that were not fashioned for lies, and from eyes never made to even look untruths.

"I had never supposed there was such a thing as real clairvoyance," he said at last.

She remained silent, her candid gaze on him.

"I believe that *you* believe it, of course."

She smiled, then sighed:

"There is no pleasure in it to me. I wish it were not so."

"But, if it is so, you ought to find it — interesting —"

"No."

"Why not? I should think you would! — if you can see — things — that other people cannot."

"I don't care to see them."

"Why?"

"They — I see them so often — and I seldom know who they are —"

"They?"

"The — people — I see."

"Don't they ever speak to you?"

"Seldom."

"Could you find out who they are?"

"I don't know . . . Yes, I think so; — if I made an effort."

"Don't you ever use any effort to evoke —"

"Oh, Clive! *No!* When I tell you I had rather not see so — so clearly —"

"You dear girl!" he exclaimed, half smiling, half serious, "why should it distress you?"

"It doesn't — except to talk about it."

"Let me ask one more question. May I?"

She nodded.

"Then — did you recognise whoever it was you saw a few moments ago?"

"Yes."

"Who was it, Athalie?"

"My mother."

CHAPTER X

EARLY in April C. Bailey, Jr., overdrew his account, was politely notified of that oversight by the bank. He hunted about, casually, for stray funds, but to his intense surprise discovered nothing immediately available.

Which annoyed him, and he explained the situation to his father; who demanded further and sordidly searching explanations concerning the expenditure on his son's part of an income more than adequate for any unmarried young man.

They undertook this interesting line of research together, but there came a time in the proceedings when C. Bailey, Jr., betrayed violent inclinations toward reticence, non-communication, and finally secrecy; in fact he declined to proceed any further or to throw any more light upon his reasons for not proceeding, which symptoms were characteristic and perfectly familiar to his father.

"The trouble is," concluded Bailey, Sr., "you have been throwing away your income on that Greensleeve girl! What is she — your private property?"

"No."

The two men looked at each other, steadily enough. Bailey, Sr., said: "If *that's* the case — why in the name of common sense do you spend so much money

on her?" Naïve logic on the part of Bailey, Sr. Clive replied:

"I didn't suppose I was spending very much. I like her. I like her better than any other girl. She is really wonderful, father. You won't believe it if I say she is charming, well-bred, clever —"

"I believe *that!*"

—"And," continued Clive —"absolutely unselfish and non-mercenary."

"If she's all that, too, it certainly seems to pay her — materially speaking."

"You don't understand," said his son patiently. "From the very beginning of our friendship it has been very difficult for me to make her accept anything — even when she was in actual need. Our friendship is not on *that* basis. She doesn't care for me because of what I do for her. It may surprise you to hear me —"

"My son, nothing surprises me any more, not even virtue and honesty. This girl may be all you think her. Personally I never met any like her, but I've read about them in sentimental fiction. No doubt there's a basis for such popular heroines. There may have been such paragons. There may be yet. Perhaps you've collided with one of these feminine curiosities."

"I have."

"All right, Clive. Only, why linger longer in the side-show than the price of admission warrants? The main tent awaits you. In more modern metaphor; it's the same film every hour, every day, the same or-

chestrion, the same environment. You've seen enough. There's nothing more — if I clearly understand your immaculate intentions. Do I?"

"Yes," said Clive, reddening.

"All right; there's nothing more, then. It's time to retire. You've had your amusement, and you've paid for it like a gentleman — very much like a gentleman — rather exorbitantly. That's the way a gentleman always pays. So now suppose you return to your own sort and coyly reappear amid certain circles recently neglected, and which, at one period of your career, you permitted yourself to embellish and adorn with your own surpassing personality."

They both laughed; there had been, always, a very tolerant understanding between them.

Then Clive's face grew graver.

"Father," he said, "I've tried remaining away. It doesn't do any good. The longer I stay away from her, the more anxious I am to go back. . . . It's really friendship I tell you."

"You're not in love with her, are you, Clive?"

The son hesitated: "No! . . . No, I can't be. I'm very certain that I am not."

"What would you do if you were?"

"But —"

"What would you *do* about it?"

"I don't know."

"Marry her?"

"I couldn't do that!" muttered Clive, startled. Then he remained silent, his mind crowded with the component parts of that vague sum-total which had so

startled him at the idea of marrying Athalie Greensleeve.

Partly his father's blunt question had jarred him, partly the idea of marrying anybody at all. Also the mere idea of the storm such a proceeding would raise in the world he inhabited, his mother being the storm-centre, dispensing anathema, thunder, and lightning, appalled him.

"What!"

"I couldn't do *that*," he repeated, gazing rather blankly at his father.

"You could if you *had* to," said his father, curtly. "But I take your word it couldn't come to that."

The boy flushed hotly, but said nothing. He shrank from comprehending such an impossible situation, ashamed for himself, ashamed for Athalie, resenting even the exaggerated and grotesque possibility of such a thing — such a monstrous and horrible thing playing any part in her life or in his.

The frankness and cynicism of Bailey, Sr., had possibly been pushed too far. Clive became restless; and the calm entente cordiale ended for a while.

Ended also his visits to Athalie for a while, the paternal conversation having, somehow, chilled his desire to see her and spoiled, for the time anyway, any pleasure in being with her.

Also his father offered to help him out financially; and, somehow, he felt as though Bailey, Sr., was paying for his own gifts to Athalie. Which idea mortified him, and he resolved to remain away from her until he recovered his self-respect — which would be duly recov-

ered, he felt certain, when the next coupons fell due and he could detach them and extinguish the parental loan.

For a week or two he did not even wish to see her, so ashamed and sullied did he feel after the way his father had handled and bruised the delicate situation, and the name of the young girl who so innocently adorned it.

No, something had been spoiled for him, temporarily. He felt it. Something of the sweetness, the innocence, the candour of this blameless friendship had been marred. The bloom was rubbed off; the piquant freshness and fragrance gone for the present.

It is true that an unexpected boom in his business kept him and his father almost feverishly active and left them both fatigued at night. This lasted for a week or two — long enough to excite all real estate men with a hope for future prosperity not yet entirely dead. But at the end of two or three weeks that hope began to die its usual, lingering death.

Dulness set in; the talk was of Harlem, Westchester, and the Bronx: a private bank failed, then three commercial houses went to the wall; and a seat was sold for $25,000 on the Exchange. Business resumed its normal and unexaggerated course. The days of boom were surely ended; and vacant lots on Fifth Avenue threatened to remain vacant for a while longer.

Clive began to drop in at his clubs again. One was a Whipper-Snapper Club to which young Manhattan aspired when freshly released from college; the others were of the fashionable and semi-fashionable sort, tedious, monotonous, full of the aimless, the idle, or

of that bustling and showy smartness which is perhaps even less admirable and less easy to endure.

Men destitute of mental resources and dependent upon others for their amusement, disillusioned men, lazy men, socially ambitious men, men gluttonously or alcoholically predisposed haunted these clubs. To one of them repaired those who were inclined to racquettes, squash, tennis, and the swimming tank. It was a sort of social clearing house for other clubs.

But The Geyser was the least harmless of the clubs affected by C. Bailey, Jr.,— it being an all-night resort and the haunt of the hopeless sport. Here dissipation, futile, aimless, meaningless, was on its native heath. Here, on his own stamping ground, prowled the youthful scion of many a dissipated race — nouveau riche and Knickerbocker alike. All that was required of anybody was money and a depthless capacity.

It was in this place that Clive encountered Cecil Reeve one stormy midnight.

"You don't come here often, do you?" said the latter.

Clive said he didn't.

"Neither do I. But when I do there's a few doing. Will you have a high one, Clive? In deference to our late and revered university?"

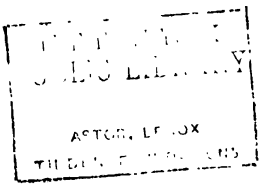
Clive would so far consent to degrade himself for the honour of Alma Mater.

There was much honour done her that evening.

Toward the beginning of the end Clive said: "I can't sit up all night, Cecil. What do you do for a living, anyway?"

"Bank a bit."

"It was in this place that Clive encountered Cecil Reeve one stormy midnight."


ASTOR, LENOX

"Oh, that's just amusement. What do you work at?"

"I didn't mean that kind of bank!" said Reeve, annoyed. All sense of humour fled him when hammer-locked with Bacchus. At such psychological moments, too, he became indiscreet. And now he proposed to Clive an excursion amid what he termed the "high lights of Olympus," which the latter discouraged.

"All right then. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give a Byzantine party! I know a little girl—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"She's a fine little girl, Clive—"

"This is no hour to send out invitations."

"Why not? Her name is Catharine—"

"Dry up!"

"Catharine Greensleeve—"

"What!"

"Certainly. She's a model at Winton's joint. She's a peach. Appropriately crowned with roses she might have presided for Lucullus."

Clive said: "By that you mean she's all right, don't you? You'd better mean it anyway!"

"Is that so?"

"Yes, that's so. I know her sister. She's a charming girl. All of them are all right. You understand, don't you?"

"I understand numerous things. One of 'em's Catharine Greensleeve. And she's some plum, believe *me!*"

"That's all right, too, so stop talking about it!" retorted Clive sharply.

"Sure it's all right. Don't worry, just because you know her sister, will you?"

Clive shrugged. Reeve was in a troublesome mood, and he left him and went home feeling vaguely irritated and even less inclined than ever to see Athalie; which state of mind perplexed and irritated him still further.

He went to one or two dances during the week — a thing he had not done lately. Then he went to several more; also to a number of débutante theatre parties and to several suppers. He rather liked being with his own sort again; the comfortable sense of home-coming, of conventionalism, of a pleasant social security, appealed to him after several months' irresponsible straying from familiar paths. And he began to go about the sheep-walks and enjoy it, slipping back rather easily into accustomed places and relations with men and women who belonged in a world never entered, never seen by Athalie Greensleeve, and of the existence of which she was aware only through the daily papers.

He wrote to her now and then. Always she answered his letter the following day.

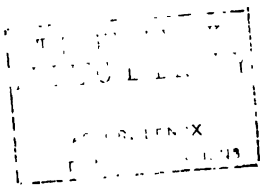
About the end of April he wrote:

"Dear Athalie,

"About everything seems to conspire to keep me from seeing you; business — in a measure,— social duties; and, to tell the truth, a mistaken but strenuous opposition on my mother's part.

"She doesn't know you, and refuses to. But she knows me, and ought to infer everything delightful in the girl who has become my friend. Because she

"He rather liked being with his own sort again."



knows that I don't, and never did affect the other sort.

"Every day, recently, she has asked me whether I have seen you. To avoid unpleasant discussions I haven't gone to see you. But I am going to as soon as this unreasonable alarm concerning us blows over.

"It seems very deplorable to me that two young people cannot enjoy an absolutely honest friendship unsuspected and undisturbed.

"I miss you a lot. Is the apartment comfortable? Does Michael do everything you wish? Did the cat prove a good one? I sent for the best Angora to be had from the Silver Cloud Cattery.

"Now tell me, Athalie, what can I do for you? *Please!* What is it you need; what is it you would like to have? Are you saving part of your salary?

"Tell me also what you do with yourself after business hours. Have you seen any shows? I suppose you go out with your sisters now and then.

"As for me I go about more or less. For a while I didn't: business seemed to revive and everybody in real estate became greatly excited. But it all simmered down again to the usual routine. So I've been going about to various affairs, dances and things. And, consequently, there's peace and quiet at home for me.

"Always yours,

"C Bailey, Jr."

"P.S. As I sit here writing you the desire seizes me to drop my pen, put on my hat and coat and go to see you. But I can't. There's a dinner on here, and I've got to stay for it. Good night, dear Athalie!

"Clive."

And, Clive, I am rather afraid she is beginning to care more for him than is quite safe for her to ever care for any man of that class.

"And Doris has met other men of the same kind — I don't know who they are, for she won't tell me. But after the theatre she goes out with them; and it is doing her no good.

"There is only one more item in my confession, then I'm done.

"It is this: I have heard recently from various sources that my being seen with you so frequently is causing much gossip concerning you among your friends.

"Is this true? And if it is, will it damage you? I don't care about myself. I know very few people and it doesn't matter. Besides I care enough about our companionship to continue it, whatever untruths are said or thought about me. But how about *you*, Clive? Because I also care enough for you to give you up if my being seen with you is going to disgrace you.

"This is my confession. I have told you all. Now, could you tell me what it is best for us to do?

"Think clearly; act wisely; don't even dream of sacrificing yourself with your usual generosity — if it is indeed to be a case for self-sacrifice. Let me do that by giving you up. I shall do it anyway if ever I am convinced that my companionship is hurting your reputation.

"Be just to us both by being frank with me. Your decision shall be my law.

"This is a long, long letter. I can't seem to let it go to you — as though when I mail it I am snapping one more bond that still seems to hold us together.

"My daily life is agreeable if a trifle monotonous. I have been out two or three times, once to see the Morgan Collection at the Metropolitan Museum — very dazzling and wonderful. What strange thoughts it evoked in me — thrilling, delightful, exhilarating — as though inspiring me to some blind effort or other. Isn't it ridiculous? — as though *I* had it in me to do anything or be anybody! I'm merely telling you how all that exquisite art affected me — *me* — a working girl. And Oh, Clive! I don't think anything ever gave me as much pleasure as did the paintings by the French masters, Lancret, Drouais, and Fragonard! (You see I had a catalogue!)

"Another evening I went out with Catharine. Mr. Reeve asked us, and another man. We went to see 'Once Upon a Time' at the Half-Moon Theatre, and afterward we went to supper at the Café Columbine.

"Another evening the other man, Mr. Reeve's friend, a Mr. Hargrave, asked me to see 'Under the Sun' at the Zig-Zag Theatre. It was a tiresome show. We went to supper afterward to meet Catharine and Mr. Reeve.

"That is all except that I've dined out once or twice with Mr. Hargrave. And, somehow or other I felt queer and even conspicuous going to the Regina with him and to other places where you and I have been so often together. . . . Also I felt a little depressed. Everything always reminded me of you and of happy

evenings with you. I can't seem to get used to going about with other men. But they seem to be very nice, very kind, and very amusing.

"And a girl ought to be thankful to almost anybody who will take her out of her monotony.

"I'm afraid you've given me a taste for luxury and amusement. You *have* spoiled me I fear. I am certainly an ungrateful little beast, am I not, to lay the blame on you! But it is dull, Clive, after working all day to sit every evening reading alone, or lie on the bed and stare at the ceiling, waiting for the others to come home.

"If it were not for that darling cat you gave me I'd perish of sheer solitude. But he is such a comfort, Hafiz; and his eyes are the bluest blue and his long, winter fur the snowiest white, and his ruff is wonderful and his tail magnificent. Also he is *very* affectionate to me. For which, with perfect reverence, I venture to thank God.

"Good night, Clive. If you've struggled through this letter so far you won't mind reading that I am faithfully and always your friend,

"ATHALIE GREENSLEEVE."

Her letter thoroughly aroused Clive and he was all for going straight to her — only he couldn't go that evening because he dared not break a dinner engagement or fail to appear with his mother at the opera. In fact he was already involved in a mess of social obligations for two weeks ahead,— not an evening free — and Athalie worked during the day.

It gave him an odd, restless sensation to hear of her going about with Francis Hargrave — dining alone with him. He felt almost hurt as though she had done him a personal injustice, yet he knew that it was absurd for him to resent anything of that sort. His monopoly of her happened to be one merely because she, at that time, knew no other man of his sort, and would not go out with any other kind of man.

Why should he expect her to remain eternally isolated except when he chose to take her out? No young girl could endure that sort of thing too long. Certainly Athalie was inevitably destined to meet other men, be admired, admire in her turn, accept invitations. She was unusually beautiful,— a charming, intelligent, clean-cut, healthy young girl. She required companionship and amusement; she would be unhuman if she didn't.

Only — men were men. And safe and sane friendships between men of his own caste, and girls like Athalie Greensleeve, were rare.

Clive chafed and became restive and morose. In vain he repeated to himself that what Athalie was doing was perfectly natural. But it didn't make the idea of her going out with other men any more attractive to him.

His clever mother, possibly aware of what ferment was working in her son, watched him out of the tail of her ornamental eyes, but wisely let him alone to fidget his own way out of it. She had heard that the Greensleeve girl was raising hob with Cecil Reeve and Francis Hargrave. They were other people's sons, however.

And it might have worked itself out of Clive — this restless ferment which soured his mind and gave him an acid satisfaction in being anything but cordial in his own family circle.

But there was a girl — a débutante, very desirable for Clive his mother thought — one Winifred Stuart — and very delightful to look upon.

And Clive had seen just enough of her to like her exceedingly; and, at dances, had even wandered about to look for her, and had evinced boredom and dissatisfaction when she had not been present.

Which inspired his mother to give a theatre party for little Miss Stuart and two dozen other youngsters, and a supper at the Regina afterward.

It was an excellent idea; and it went as wrong as such excellent ideas so often go. For as Clive in company with the others sauntered into the splendid reception room of the Regina, he saw Athalie come in with a man whom he had never before seen.

The shock of recognition — for it was a shock — was mutual. Athalie's dark eyes widened and a little colour left her cheeks: and Clive reddened painfully.

It was, perhaps, scarcely the thing to do, but as she advanced he stepped forward, and their hands met.

"I am so very glad to see you again," he said.

"I too, Clive. Are you well?"

"And you?"

"Quite," she hesitated; there was a moment's pause while the two men looked coolly at each other.

"May I present Mr. Bailey, Captain Dane?"

Further she did not account for Captain Dane, who presently took her off somewhere leaving Clive to return to his smiling but enraged mother.

Never had he found any supper party so noisy, so mirthless, and so endless. Half the time he didn't know what he was saying to Winifred Stuart or to anybody else. Nor could he seem to see anybody very distinctly, for the mental phantoms of Athalie and Captain Dane floated persistently before him, confusing everything at moments except the smiling and deadly glance of his mother.

Afterward they went to their various homes in various automobiles, and Clive was finally left with his mother in his own drawing-room.

"What you did this evening," she said to her son, "was not exactly the thing to do under the circumstances, Clive."

"Why not?" he asked wearily as her maid relieved her of her sables and lace hood.

"Because it was not necessary. . . . That girl you spoke to was the Greensleeve girl I suppose?"

"Yes, Athalie Greensleeve."

"Who was the man?"

"I don't know — a Captain Dane I believe."

"Wasn't a civil bow enough?"

"Enough? Perhaps; I don't know, mother. I don't seem to know how much is due her from me. She's never had anything from me so far — anything worth having —"

"Don't be a fool, Clive."

He said, absently: "It's too late for such advice!

I *am* a fool. And I don't quite understand how not to be one."

His mother, rather fearful of arousing in him any genuine emotion, discreetly kissed him good night.

"You're a slightly romantic boy," she said. "There is nothing else the matter with you."

They mounted the velvet-covered stairway together, her arm around his neck, his encircling a slender, pliant waist that a girl of sixteen might have envied. Her maid followed with furs and hood.

"Come into my bedroom and smoke, Clive," she smiled. "We can talk through the dressing-room door."

"No; I think I'll turn in."

The maid continued on through the rose and ivory bedroom and into the dressing-room. Mrs. Bailey lingered, intuition and experience preparing her for what a boy of that age was very sure to say.

And after some fidgeting about he said it:

"Mother, honestly what did you think of her?"

His mother's smile remained unaltered: "Do you mean the Greensleeve girl?"

"I mean Athalie Greensleeve."

"She is pretty in a rather common way."

"Common!"

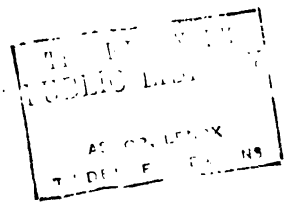
"Did you think she is not?"

"Common," he repeated in boyish astonishment. "What is there common about her?"

"If *you* can't see it any woman of your own class can."

Which remark aroused all that was dramatic and

"'Wasn't a civil bow enough?'"



poetic in the boy, and he spoke with a slightly exaggerated phraseology:

"What is there common about this very beautiful girl? Surely not her features. Her head, her figure, her hands, her feet are delicate and very exquisitely formed; in her bearing there is an unconscious and sweet dignity; her voice is soft, charming, well-bred. What is there about her that you find common?"

His mother, irritated and secretly dismayed, maintained, however, her placid mask and her attitude of toleration.

She said: "I distinguish between a woman to the manner born, and a woman who is not. The difference is as subtle as intuition and as wide as the ocean. And, dear, no young man, however clever, is clever enough to instruct his mother concerning such matters."

"I was asking you to instruct me," he said.

"Very well. If you wish to know the difference between the imitation and the real, compare that young woman with Winifred Stuart."

Clive's gaze shifted from his mother and became fixed on space.

After a moment his pretty mother moved toward the dressing-room: "If you will find a chair and light a cigarette, Clive, we can continue talking."

His absent eyes reverted to her: "I think I'll go, mother. Good night."

"Good night, dear."

He went to his own room. From the room adjoining came his father's heavy breathing where he lay asleep.

The young fellow listened for a moment, then walked into the library where only a dim night-light was burning. He still wore his overcoat over his evening clothes, and carried his hat and stick.

For a while he stood in the dim library, head bent, staring at the rug under foot.

Then he turned, went out and down the stairs, and opened the door of the butler's pantry. The service telephone was there. He unhooked the receiver and called. Almost immediately he got his "party."

"Yes?" came the distant voice distinctly.

"Is it you, Athalie?"

"Yes. . . . Oh, *Clive!*"

"Didn't you recognise my voice?"

"Not immediately."

"When did you come in?"

"Just this moment. I still have on my evening wrap."

"Did you have an agreeable evening?"

"Yes."

"Are you tired?"

"No."

"May I come around and see you for a few minutes?"

"Yes."

"All right," he said briefly.

CHAPTER XI

THE door of the apartment stood ajar and he walked in. Athalie, still in her evening gown, rose from the sofa before the fire, dropping the white Angora, Hafiz, from her lap.

"It's so good of you, Clive," she said, offering her hand.

"It's good of *you*, Athalie, to let me come."

"*Let* you!" There was a smile on her sensitive lips, scarcely perceptible.

He dropped coat, hat, and walking stick across a chair; she seated herself on the sofa, and he came over and found a place for himself beside her.

"It's been a long time, Athalie. Has it seemed so to you?"

She nodded. Hafiz, marching to and fro, his plumy tail curling around her knees, looked up at his mistress out of sapphire eyes.

"Jump, darling," she said invitingly. Hafiz sprang onto her lap with a quick contented little mew, stretched his superb neck and began to rub against her shoulder, purring ecstatically.

"He'll cover me with long white hairs," she remarked to Clive, "but I don't care. Isn't he a beauty? Hasn't he seraphic eyes and angelic manners?"

Clive nodded, watching the cat with sombre and detached interest.

She said, stroking Hafiz and looking down at the magnificent animal: "Did you have a pleasant evening, Clive?"

"Not very."

"I'm sorry. Your party seemed to be such a very gay one."

"They made a lot of noise."

She laughed: "Is that a very gracious way to put it?"

"Probably not. . . . Where had you been before you appeared at the Regina?"

"To see some moving pictures taken in the South American jungle. It was really wonderful, Clive: there were parrots and monkeys and crocodiles and wild pigs — peccaries I think they are called — and then a big, spotted, chunky-headed jaguar stalked into view! I was so excited, so interested —"

"Where was it?"

"On the middle fork of the upper Amazon —"

"I mean where were the films exhibited?"

"Oh! At the Berkeley. It was a private view."

"Who invited you?"

"Captain Dane."

He looked up at her, soberly:

"Who is Captain Dane?"

"Why — I don't know exactly. He is a most interesting man. I think he has been almost everything — a naturalist, an explorer, a scout in the Boer War, a soldier of fortune, a newspaper man. He is fascinating to talk to, Clive."

"Where did you meet him?"

"In the office. Mr. Wahlbaum collects orchids, and Captain Dane looked up some for him when he was on the Amazon a short time ago. He came into the office about week before last and Mr. Wahlbaum introduced him to me. They sat there talking for an hour. It was *so* interesting to me; and I think Captain Dane noticed how attentively I listened, for very often he addressed himself to me. . . . And he asked Mr. Wahlbaum, very nicely, if he might show me the orchids which are in the Botanical Gardens, and that is how our friendship began."

"You go about with him?"

"Whenever he asks me. I went with him last Sunday to the Museum of Natural History. Just think, Clive, I had never been. And, do you know, he could scarcely drag me away."

"I suppose you dined with him afterward," he said coolly.

"Yes, at a funny little place — I couldn't tell you where it is — but everybody seemed to know everybody else and it was so jolly and informal — and such good food! I met a number of people there some of whom have called on me since —"

"What sort of people?"

"About every interesting sort — men like Captain Dane, writers, travellers, men engaged in unusual professions. And there were a few delightful women present, all in some business or profession. Mlle. Delauny of the Opera was there — so pretty and so unaffected. And there was also that handsome suffragette who looks like Jeanne d' Arc —"

"Nina Grey."

"Yes. And there was a rather strange and fascinating woman — a physician I believe — but I am not sure. Anyway she is associated with the psychical research people, and she asked if she might come to see me —"

He made an impatient movement — quite involuntary — and Hafiz who was timid, sprang from Athalie's lap and retreated, tail waving, and ears flattened for expected blandishments to recall him.

Athalie glanced up at the man beside her with a laugh on her lips, which died there instantly.

"What is the matter, Clive?"

"Nothing," he said.

His sullen face remained in profile, and after a moment she laid her hand lightly, questioningly on his sleeve.

Without turning he said: "I don't know what is the matter with me, so don't ask me. Something seems to be wrong. *I* am, probably . . . And I think I'll go home, now."

But he did not stir.

After a few moments she said very gently: "Are you displeased with me for anything I have said or done? I can't imagine —"

"You can't expect me to feel very much flattered by the knowledge that you are constantly seen with other men where you and I were once so well known."

"Clive! Is there anything wrong in my going?"

"Wrong? No: — if your own sense of — of —" but the right word — if there were such — eluded him.

"I know how you feel," she said in a low voice. "I wrote you that it seemed strange, almost sad, to be with other men where you and I had been together so often and so — so happily.

"Somehow it seemed to be an invasion of our privacy, of our intimacy — for me to dine with other men at the same tables, be served by the same waiters, hear the same music. But I didn't know how to avoid it when I was taken there by other men. Could you tell me what I should have done?"

He made no reply; his boyish face grew almost sulky, now.

Presently he rose as though to get his coat: she rose also, unhappy, confused.

"Don't mind me. I'm a fool," he said shortly, looking away from her —" and a very — unhappy one —"

"Clive!"

He said savagely: "I tell you I don't know what's the matter with me —" He passed one hand brusquely across his eyes and stood so, scowling at the hearth where Hafiz sat, staring gravely back at him.

"Clive, are you ill?"

He shrugged away the suggestion, and his arm brushed against hers. The contact seemed to paralyse him; but when, slipping back unconsciously into the old informalities, she laid her hands on his shoulders and turned him toward the light, instantly and too late she was aware that the old and innocent intimacy was ended, done for,— a thing of the past.

Incredulous still in the very menace of new and perilous relations — of a new intimacy, imminent, threaten-

ing, she withdrew her hands from the shoulders of this man who had been a boy but an instant ago. And the next moment he caught her in his arms.

"Clive! You *can't* do this!" she whispered, deathly white.

"What am I to do?" he retorted fiercely.

"Not this, Clive!—For my sake—please—*please*—"

There was colour enough in her face, now. Breathless, still a little frightened, she looked away from him, plucking nervously, instinctively, at his hands clasping her waist.

"Can't you c-care for me, Athalie?" he stammered.

"Yes . . . you know it. But don't touch me, Clive—"

"When I'm—in love—with you—"

She caught her breath sharply.

"—What am I to do?" he repeated between his teeth.

"Nothing! There is nothing to do about it! You know it! . . . What is there to do?"

He held her closer and she strained away from him, her head still averted.

"Let me go, Clive!" she pleaded.

"Can't you care for me!"

"Let me go!"

He said under his breath: "All right." And released her. For a moment she did not move but her hands covered her burning face and sealed her lids. She stood there, breathing fast and irregularly until she heard him move. Then, lowering her hands she

cast a heart-broken glance at him. And his ashen, haggard visage terrified her.

"Clive!" she faltered: he swung on his heel and caught her to him again.

She offered no resistance.

She was crying, now,— weeping perhaps for all that had been said — or remained unsaid — or maybe for all that could never be said between herself and this man in whose arms she was trembling. No need now for any further understanding, for excuses, for regrets, for any tardy wish expressed that things might have been different.

He offered no explanation; she expected none, would have suffered none, crying there silently against his shoulder. But the reaction was already invading him; the tide of self-contempt rose.

He said bitterly: "Now that I've done all the damage I could, I shall have to go — or offer —"

"There is no damage done — yet —"

"I have made you love me."

"I — don't know. Wait."

Wet cheek against his shoulder, lips a-quiver, her tragic eyes looked out into space seeing nothing yet except the spectre of this man's unhappiness.

Not for herself had the tears come, the mouth quivered. The flash of passionate emotion in him had kindled in her only a response as blameless as it was deep.

Sorrow for him, for his passion recognised but only vaguely understood, grief for a comradeship forever ended now — regret for the days that now could come

no more — but no thought of self as yet, nothing of resentment, of the lesser pity, the baser pride.

If she had trembled it was for their hopeless future; if she had wept it was because she saw his boyhood passing out of her life like a ghost, leaving her still at heart a girl, alone beside the ashes of their friendship.

As for marriage she knew it would never be — that neither he nor she dared subscribe to it, dared face its penalties and its punishments; that her fear of his unknown world was as spontaneous and abiding as his was logical and instinctive.

There was nothing to do about it. She knew that instantly; knew it from the first; — no balm for him, no outlook, no hope. For her — had she thought about herself,— she could have entertained none.

She turned her head on his shoulder and looked up at him out of pitiful, curious eyes.

"Clive, must this be?"

"I love you, Athalie."

Her gaze remained fixed on him as though she were trying to comprehend him,— sad, candid, searching in his eyes for an understanding denied her.

"Yes," she said vaguely, "my thoughts are full of you, too. They have always been since I first saw you. I suppose it has been love. I didn't know it."

"Is it love, Athalie?"

"I — think so, Clive. What else could it be — when a girl is always thinking about a man, always happy with her memories of him. . . . It *is* love, I suppose . . . only I never thought of it that way."

"Can you think of it that way now?"

"I haven't changed, Clive. If it was love in the beginning, it is now."

"In the beginning it was only a boy and girl affair."

"It was all my heart had room for."

"And now?"

"You fill my heart and mind as always. But you know that."

"I thought — perhaps — not seeing you —"

"Clive!"

"— Other men — other interests —" he muttered obstinately, and so like a stubborn boy that, for a moment, a pale flash from the past seemed to light them both, and she found herself smiling:

"A girl must go on living until she is dead, Clive. Even if you went away I'd continue to exist until something ended me. Other men are merely other men. You are you."

"You darling!"

But she turned shy instantly, conscious now of his embrace, confused by it and the whispered endearment.

"Please let me go, Clive."

"But I love you, dear —"

"Yes — but please —"

Again he released her and she stepped back, retreating before him, until the lounge offered itself as refuge. But it was no refuge; she found herself, presently, drawn close to his shoulder; her flushed cheek rested there once more, and her lowered eyes were fixed on his strong, firm hand which had imprisoned both of hers.

"If you can stand it I can," he said in a low voice.

"What?"

"Marrying me."

"Oh, Clive! They'd tear us to pieces! You couldn't stand it. Neither could I."

"But if we—"

"Oh, no, no, no!" she protested, "it would utterly ruin you! There was one woman there to-night—very handsome—I knew she was your mother. And I saw the way she looked at me. . . . It's no use, Clive. Those people *are* different. They'd never forgive you, and it would ruin you or you'd have to go back to them."

"But if we were once married, there *are* friends of mine who—"

"How many? One in a thousand! Oh, Clive, Clive, I know you so well—your family and your pride in them, your position and your security in it, your wide circle of friends, without which circle you would wander like a lost soul—yes, Clive, lost, forlorn, unhappy, even with me!"

She lifted her head from his shoulder and sat up, gazing intently straight ahead of her. In her eyes was a lovely azure light; her lips were scarcely parted; and so intent and fixed was her gaze that for a moment he thought she had caught sight of some concrete thing which held her fascinated.

But it was only that she "saw clearly" at that moment—something that had come into her field of vision—a passing shape, perhaps, which looked at her with curious, friendly, inquiring eyes,—and went its way between the fire and the young girl who watched it pass with fearless and clairvoyant gaze.

"Athalie?"

"Yes," she answered as in a dream.

"Athalie! What is the matter?"

She turned, looked at him almost blindly as her remoter vision cleared.

"Clive," she said under her breath, "go home."

"What?"

"Go home. You are wanted."

"*What!!!*"

She rose and he stood up, his fascinated eyes never leaving hers.

"What were you staring at a moment ago?" he demanded. "What did you — think — you saw?"

Her eyes looked straight into his. She went to him and put both arms around his neck.

"Dearest," she said "— dearest." And kissed him on the mouth. But he dared not lay one finger on her.

The next moment she had his coat, was holding it for him. He took his hat and stick from her, turned and walked to the door, wheeled in his tracks, shivering.

And saw her crouched on the sofa, her head buried in her arms. And dared not speak.

There was an automobile standing in the street before his own house as he turned out of Fifth Avenue; lighted windows everywhere in the house, and the iron grille ajar.

He could scarcely fit the latch-key his hands were so unsteady.

There were people in the hall, partly clad. He heard his own name in frightened exclamation.

"What is it?" he managed to ask.

A servant stammered: "Mr. Clive — it's all over, sir. Mrs. Bailey is asking for you, sir."

"Is my father —" but he could not go on.

"Yes, sir. His man heard him call — once — like he was dreamin' bad. But when he got to him Mr. Bailey was gone. . . . The doctor has just arrived, sir."

For one instant hope gleamed athwart the stunning crash of his senses: he steadied himself on the newel post. Then, in his ear a faint voice echoed: "Dearest — dearest!" And, knowing that hope also lay dead, he lifted his young head, straightened up, and set his foot heavily on the first step upward into a new and terrible world of grief.

CHAPTER XII

ATHALIE ventured to send some Madonna lilies with no card attached; but even the thought of her white flowers crossing the threshold of Clive's world — although it was because of her devotion to him alone that she dared salute his dead — left her sensitively concerned, wondering whether it had been a proper thing for her to do.

However, the day following she wrote him.

"CLIVE DEAR,

"I do not mean to intrude on your grief at such a time. This is merely a line to say that you are never absent from my mind.

"And Clive, nothing really dies. This is quite true. I am not speaking of what faith teaches us. Faith is faith. But those who 'see clearly' *know*. Nothing dies, Clive. *Nothing*. That is even more than faith teaches us. Yet it, also, is true.

"Dear little boy of my childhood, dear lad of my girlhood, and, of my womanhood, dearest of men, I pray that God will comfort you and yours.

"I was twelve years old the only time I ever saw your father. He spoke so sweetly to me — put his arm around my shoulders — asked me if I were Red Riding Hood or the Princess Far Away.

"And, to obey him, I went to find *my* father. And found him dead. Or what the world calls dead.

"Later, as I stood there outside the door, stunned by what had happened, back through the doorway came running a boy. Clive, if you have forgotten what you said to that child there by the darkened doorway of life, the girl who writes this has never forgotten.

"And now, since sorrow has come to you, in my turn I seek you where you stand by a darkened door alone, and I send to you my very soul in this poor, inky letter, — all I can offer — Clive — all that I believe — all that I am.

"ATHALIE."

So much for tribute and condolence as far as she could be concerned where she remained among the other millions outside the sacred threshold across which her letter and her flowers had gone, across which the girl herself might never go.

After a few days he wrote and thanked her for her letter, not of course knowing about the lilies:

"It is the first time death has ever come very near me. I had been told and had always thought that we were a long-lived race.

"I am still dazed by it. I suppose the sharper grief will come when this dull, unreal sense of stupefaction wears away.

"We were very close together, my father and I. Oh, but we might have been closer, Athalie! — I might have been with him oftener, seen more of him, spent less time away from him.

"I *did* try to be a good son. I could have been far better. It's a bitter thing to realise at such a time.

"And I had so much to say to him. I cannot understand that I can never say it now. . . . Athalie dear, my mother wishes me to take her abroad. I made arrangements yesterday at the Cunard office. We sail Saturday. Could I see you for a moment before I go?

"CLIVE."

To which she replied:

"I shall be here every evening."

He came Friday night looking very sallow and thin in his black clothes. Catharine, who was sewing by the centre table, rose to shake hands with him in sympathetic silence, then went away to her bedroom, where, once or twice she caught herself whistling some gay refrain of the moment, and was obliged to check herself.

He had taken Athalie's slender hands and was standing by the sofa, looking intently at her.

"That night," he said with an effort, "you sent me home — saying that I was needed."

"Yes, Clive."

"How did you know?"

"I knew."

"Did you see — anything?"

"Yes, dear," she said under her breath.

"Did you see *him*?"

"Yes."

"Tell me," he said, but his lips scarcely moved to form the words he uttered.

"I recognised him at once. I had never forgotten him. . . . It is difficult to explain how I knew that he was not — what we call living."

"But you knew?"

"Yes," she said gently.

"He — did he speak?" The young fellow turned away with a brusque, hopeless gesture.

"God," he muttered —"and I couldn't either see or hear him!"

"He did not speak, Clive." The boy looked up at her, his haggard features working.

She said: "When I first noticed him he was looking at you. Then he caught my eye. Clive — it was this time as it had been before — when I was twelve years old — his expression became so sweet and winning — like yours when I amuse you — and you laugh at me but — like me —"

"Oh, Athalie — I can't seem to endure it! I — I can't be reconciled —" His head fell forward; she put her arms around him and drew his face against her breast.

"I know," she whispered. "I also have passed that way."

After a few moments he lifted his head, looked around, almost fearfully.

"Where was it that he stood, Athalie?"

She hesitated, then took one of his hands in hers and he followed her until she stopped between the sofa and the fireplace.

"Here?"

"Yes, Clive."

"So *near!*" he said aloud to himself. "Couldn't he have spoken to me? — just one word —"

"Dearest — dearest!"

"God knows why you should see him and I shouldn't! I don't understand — when I was his son —"

"I do not understand either, Clive."

He seemed not to hear her, standing there with blank gaze shifting from object to object in the room. "I don't understand," he kept repeating in a dull, almost querulous voice,—"I don't understand why." And her heart responded in a passion of tenderness and grief. But she found no further words to say to him, no explanation that might comfort him.

"Will he ever come here — anywhere — again?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, Clive, I don't know."

"Don't you know? Couldn't you find out?"

"How? I don't know how to find out. I never try to inquire."

"Isn't there some way?"

"I don't really know, Clive. How could I know?"

"But when you see such people — shadows — shapes —"

"Yes. . . . They are not shadows."

"Do they seem real?"

"Why, yes; as real as you are."

"Athalie, how *can* they be?"

"They are to me. There is nothing ghostly about them."

For a moment it almost seemed to her as though he resented her clear seeing; then he said: "Have you always been able to see — this way?"

"As long as I can remember."

"And you have never tried to cultivate the power?"

"I had rather you did not call it that."

"But it is a power. . . . Well, call it faculty, then. Have you?"

"No. I told you once that I did not wish to see more clearly than others. It is all involuntary with me."

"Would you try to cultivate it because I ask you to?"

"Clive!"

"Will you, Athalie?"

The painful colour mantled her face and neck and she turned and looked away from him as though he had said a shameful thing.

He continued, impatiently: "Why do you feel that way about it? Why should you not cultivate such a delicate and wonderful sense of perception? Why are you reluctant? What reason is there for you to be ashamed?"

"I don't know why."

"There is no reason! If in you there happen to be faculties sensitive beyond ours, senses more complex, more exquisitely attuned to what others are blind and deaf to, intuitions that to us seem miraculous, a spirituality, perhaps, more highly developed, what is there in that to cause you either embarrassment or concern? That in certain individualities such is the case is now

generally understood and recognised. You happen to be one of them."

She looked up at him very quietly, but still flushed.

"Why do you wish me to try — make any effort to develop this — thing?"

"So that — if you *could* see him again — and if, perhaps, he had anything to say to me —"

"I understand."

"Will you try, Athalie?"

"I'll try — if you wish it. And if I can learn how to try."

Had he asked her to strip her gown from her shoulders under his steady gaze, it had been easier than the promise she gave him.

And now the hour had come for him to bid her goodbye. He said that he and his mother would not remain abroad for more than the summer. He said he would write often; spoke a little more vaguely of seeing her as soon as he returned; drew her cool, white hands together and kissed them, laid his cheek against them for a moment, eyes closed wearily.

The door remained ajar behind him after he had gone. Lingering, her hand heavy on the knob, she listened to the last echo of the elevator as it dropped into lighted depths below.

Then, very far away, an iron grille clanged. And that ended it.

But she still lingered. There was one more shape to pass through the door which she yet held open; — the phantom of her girlhood. And when at last, it had

passed across the threshold, never to return, she shut the door softly, sinking to her knees there, her pale cheek resting against the closed panels, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

So departed those twain out of the room and out of her life, together — her lover by brevet, and her lingering girlhood,— leaving behind them a woman in a world of men suddenly strange and menacing and very still.

But Clive went back into a familiar world — marred, obscured, distorted for the moment by shock and sorrow — but still a familiar world. Because neither his grief nor his love — as he had termed it — had made of him more than he had been,— not yet a man, yet no longer a boy, but something with all the infirmities of both and the saving graces of neither.

In that borderland where he still lingered, morally and spiritually, the development of character ceases for a while until such time as the occult frontier be crossed. What is born in the cradle is lowered into the grave, but always either in nobler or less noble degrees. For none may linger in that borderland too long because the unseen boundary moves for him who will not stir when his time is up — moves slowly, inexorably nearer, nearer, passing beneath his feet, until it is lost far in the misty years behind him.

He wrote her from the steamer twice, the letters being mailed from Plymouth; then he wrote once from London, once from Paris; later again from Switzerland,

"One lovely morning in May she arose early in order to write to Clive."

delicately aglow, exhilarated as always by her hour of communion with him.

Mr. Wahlbaum, as usual, received her with the jolly and kindly humour which always characterised him, and they had their usual friendly, half bantering chat while she was arranging the papers which his secretary had laid on her desk.

All the morning she took dictation; the soft wind fluttered the curtains; sparrows chirped noisily; the sky was very blue; Mr. Wahlbaum smoked steadily.

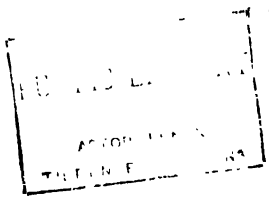
And when the lunch hour arrived he did a thing which he had never before done; he asked Athalie to lunch with him.

Which so completely astonished her that she found herself going down in the private lift with him before she realised that she was going at all.

The luncheon proved to be very simple but very good. There were a number of other women in the ladies' annex of the Department Club,—nice looking people, quiet, and well dressed. Mr. Wahlbaum also was very quiet, very considerate, very attentive, and almost gravely courteous. Their conversation concerned business. He offered Athalie no cocktail and no wine, but a jug of chilled cider was set at her elbow and she found it delicious. Mr. Wahlbaum drank tea, very weak.

When they returned to the office, Athalie began to transcribe her stenographic notes. It occupied most of the afternoon although she was wonderfully rapid and accurate and her slim white fingers hovered mistily over the keys like the vibrating wings of a snowy moth.

"Mr. Wahlbaum . . . was very quiet, very considerate, very attentive."



Mr. Wahlbaum, always smoking, watched her toward the finish in placid silence. And for a few moments, also, after she had finished and had turned to him with a light smile and a lighter sigh of relief.

"Miss Greensleeve," he said quietly, "I have now been here in the same office with you, day after day — excepting our summer vacations — for more than five years."

A trifle surprised and sobered by his gravity and deliberation she nodded silent acquiescence and waited, wondering a little what else was to come.

It came without preamble: "I have the honour," he said, "to ask you to marry me."

Still as a stone she sat, gazing at him. And for a long while his keen eyes sustained her gaze. But presently a slow, deep colour began to gather on his face. And after a moment he said: "I am sorry that the verdict is against me."

Tears filled her eyes; she tried to speak, could not, turned on her pivot-chair, rested her arms on the back, and dropped her face in them.

It was a long while before she was able to efface the traces of emotion. She did all she could before she forced herself to look at him again and say what she must say.

"If I could — I would, Mr. Wahlbaum," she faltered. "No man has ever been kinder to me, none more courteous, none more gentle."

He looked at her wistfully for a moment, and she thought he was going to speak. But he was wise in the ways of the world. He had lost. He understood

it. Speech was superfluous. He was a quaint combination of good sportsman and philosophic economist.

He held his peace.

When she left that evening after saying good night to him she paused at the door, irresolutely, and then came back to his desk where he was still standing. For he had never failed to rise when she entered in the morning or took her leave at night.

In silence, now, she offered him her hand, the quick tears springing to her eyes again; and he took it, bent, and touched the gloved fingers with his lips, gravely, in silence.

A few days later, for the first time in her experience there, Mr. Wahlbaum was not at the office.

Mr. Grossman came in, leered at her, said that Mr. Wahlbaum would be down next day, lingered furtively as long as he quite dared, then took himself off, still leering.

In the afternoon Athalie was notified that her salary had been raised. She went home, elated and deeply touched by the generosity of Mr. Wahlbaum, scarcely able to wait for the morrow to express her gratitude to this good, kind man.

But on the morrow Mr. Wahlbaum was not there; nor did he come the day after, nor the day after that.

The following Tuesday she was seated in the office and generally occupied with business provided for her by the thrifty Mr. Grossman, when that same gentleman came into the office on tiptoe.

"Mr. Wahlbaum has just died," he said.

In the sudden shock and consternation she had risen from her chair, and stood there, one hand resting on her desk top for support.

"Pneumonia," nodded Mr. Grossman. "Sam he smoked too much all the time. That iss what done it, Miss Greensleeve."

Her hands crept to her eyes, covered them convulsively. "Oh!" she breathed—"Oh!"

And, for a moment was not aware of the arm of Mr. Grossman around her waist,—until it tightened unctuously.

"Dearie," he murmured, "don't you take on so hard. You ain't goin' to lose your job, because I'm a-goin' to be your best friend same like he was—"

With a shudder she stepped clear of him; he caught her by the waist again and kissed her; and she wrenched herself free and turned fiercely on him as he advanced again, smirking, watery of eye, arms outstretched.

Then in the overwhelming revulsion and horror of the act and of the moment chosen for it when death's shadow already lay dark upon this vast and busy monument to her dead friend, she turned on him her dark blue eyes ablaze; and to her twisted, outraged lips flew, unbidden, the furious anathema of her ragged childhood:

"Damn you!" she stammered,—"damn you!" And struck him across the face.

Which impulsive and unconsidered proceeding left two at home out of work, herself and Doris. Also

there was very little more for Catharine to do, the dull season at Winton's having arrived.

"Any honest job," repeated Doris when she and Athalie and Catharine met at evening after an all-day's profitless search for that sort of work; but honest jobs did not seem to be very plentiful in June, although any number of the other sort were to be had almost without the asking.

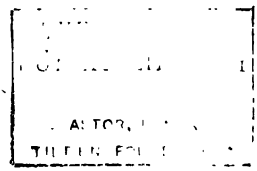
Doris continued to haunt agencies and theatrical offices, dawdling all day from one to the next, sitting for hours in company with other aspirants to histrionic honours and wages, gossiping, listening to stage talk, professional patter, and theatrical scandal until her pretty ears were buzzing with everything that ought not to concern her and her moral fastidiousness gradually became less delicate. Repetition is the great leveller, the great persuader. The greatest power on earth, for good or evil, is incessant reiteration.

Catharine lost her position, worked at a cheap milliner's for a week, addressed envelopes for another week, and was again left unemployed.

Athalie accepted several offers; at one place they didn't pay her for two weeks and then suggested she take half the salary agreed upon; at another her employer became offensively familiar; at another the manager made her position unendurable.

By July the financial outlook in the Greensleeve family was becoming rather serious: Doris threatened gloomily to go into burlesque; Catharine at first tearful and discouraged, finally grew careless and made few real efforts to find employment. Also she began to go

"Doris continued to haunt agencies and theatrical offices."



out almost every evening, admitting very frankly that the home larder had become too lean and unattractive to suit her.

Doris always went out more or less; and what troubled Athalie was not that the girl had opportunities for the decent nourishment she needed, but that her reticence concerning the people she dined with was steadily increasing.

"Oh, shut up! I can look out for myself," she always repeated sullenly. "Anyway, Athalie, *you* are not the one to bully me. Nobody ever presented me with a cosy flat and —"

"Doris!"

"Didn't your young man give you this flat?"

"Don't speak of him or of me in that manner," said Athalie, flushing scarlet.

"Why are you so particular? It's the truth. He's given you about everything a man can offer a girl, hasn't he? — jewellery, furniture, clothing — cats —"

"Will you please not say anything more!"

But Doris was still smarting under recent admonition, and she meant to make an end of Athalie's daily interference: "I will say what I like when it's the truth," she retorted. "You are very free with your unsolicited advice. And I'll say this, and it's true, that not one girl in a thousand who accepts what you have accepted from Clive Bailey, is straight!"

Athalie's tightening lips quivered: "Do you intimate that I am not straight?"

"I didn't say that."

"You implied it."

There was a silence; Catharine lounged on the sofa, watching and listening with interest. After a moment Doris shrugged her young shoulders.

"Does it matter so much, anyway?" she said with a short, unpleasant laugh.

"Does *what* matter — you little ninny!"

"Whether a girl *is* straight."

"Is that the philosophy you learn in your theatrical agencies?" demanded Athalie fiercely. "What nauseating rot you do talk, Doris!"

"Very well. It may be nauseating. But what is a girl to do in a world run entirely by men?"

"You know well enough what a girl is *not* to do, don't you? All right then,— leave that undone and do what's left."

"What *is* left?" demanded Doris with a mirthless laugh. "There's scarcely a job that a girl can hold unless she squares some man to keep it — and keep — her!"

"Shame on you! I held mine for over five years," said Athalie with hot contempt.

"Yes, and then along came the junior partner. You wouldn't square him: you lost your job! There's always a junior partner in every business — when there isn't a senior. There's nothing to it if you stand in with the firm. If you don't — good night!"

"You managed to remain at the Egyptian Garden during the entire season."

"But the fights I had, my dear, and the tricks I employed and the lies I told and the promises I made! Oh, it's sickening — sickening! But —" she shrugged

—"what are you to do? Thousands of girls go queer because they're forced to by starvation—"

"Nonsense!" cried Athalie hotly, "that is all stage twaddle and exaggerated sentimentalism! I don't believe that one girl in a thousand is forced into a dishonourable life!"

"Then why do girls go queer?"

"Because they want to; that's why! When they don't want to they don't!"

Catharine, very wide-eyed, said solemnly: "But think of all the white slaves—"

"They'd be that if they had been born to millions!" retorted Athalie. "Ignorance and aptitude, that is white slavery. It's absolutely nothing else. And in cases where the ignorance is absent, the aptitude is there. If a girl has an aptitude for becoming some man's mistress she'll probably do it whether she's ignorant or educated."

Doris, who had taken to chewing-gum furtively and in private, discreetly rolled a morsel under her tongue.

"All I know is that your salary is advanced and you're given a part at the Egyptian Garden if you stand in with Lewenbein or go to supper with Shemsky. Of course," she added, "there *are* theatres where you don't have to be horrid in order to succeed."

"Then," said Athalie drily, "you'd better find work in those theatres."

Doris glanced sideways at Catharine, who silently returned her glance as though an understanding and sympathy existed between them not suspected or shared in by Athalie.

It was not very much of a secret. Some prowling genius of the agencies whom Doris had met had offered to write a vaudeville act for her and himself if she could find two other girls. And she had persuaded Catharine and Genevieve Hunting to try it; and Cecil Reeve and Francis Hargrave had gaily offered to back it. They were rehearsing in Reeve's apartments — between a continuous series of dinners and suppers.

And it had been her sister's going to Reeve's apartments to which Athalie had seriously objected,— not knowing why she went there.

This was one of many scenes that torrid summer in New York, when Athalie intuitively felt that the year which had begun so happily for her with the entrance of Clive into her life, was growing duller and greyer; and that each succeeding day seemed to be swinging her into a tide of anxiety and mischance,— a current as yet merely perceptible, but already increasing in speed toward something swifter and more stormy.

Already, to her, the future had become overcast, obscure, disquieting.

Steer as she might toward any promising harbour, always she seemed to be aware of some subtle resistance impeding her.

Every small economy attempted, every retrenchment planned, came to nothing. Always she was met at some corner by an unlooked-for necessity entailing further expense.

No money was coming in; her own and her sister's savings were going steadily, every day, every week.

There seemed no further way to check expenditure. Athalie had dismissed their servant as soon as she had lost her position at Wahlbaum and Grossman's. Table expenses were reduced to Spartan limits, much to the disgust of them all. No clothes were bought, no luxuries, no trifles. They did their own marketing, their own cooking, their own housework and laundry. And had it not been that the apartment entailed no outlay for light, heat, and rent, they would have been sorely perplexed that spring and summer in New York.

Athalie permitted herself only one luxury, Hafiz. And one necessity; stamps and letter paper for foreign correspondence.

The latter was costing her less and less recently. Clive wrote seldom now. And always very sensitive where he was concerned, she permitted herself the happiness of writing only after he had taken the initiative, and a reply from her was due him.

No, matters were not going very well with Athalie. Also she was frequently physically tired. Perhaps it was the lassitude consequent on the heat. But at times she had an odd idea that she lacked courage; and sometimes when lonely, she tried to reason with herself, tried to teach her heart bravery — particularly during the long interims which elapsed between Clive's letters.

As for her attitude toward him — whether or not she was in love with him — she was too busy thinking about him to bother her head about attitudes or degrees of affection. All the girl knew — when she permitted herself to think of herself — was that she missed him dreadfully. Otherwise her concern was chiefly for him,

for his happiness and well-being. Also she was concerned regarding the promise she had made him — and to which he usually referred in his letters,— the promise to try to learn more about this faculty of hers for clear vision, and, if possible, to employ it for his sake and in his unhappy service.

This often preoccupied her, troubled her. She did not know how to go about it; she hesitated to seek those who advertised their alleged occult powers for sale,— trance-mediums, mind-readers, palmists — all the heterogeneous riffraff lurking always in metropolitan purlieus, and always with a sly weather-eye on the police.

As usual in her career since the time she could first remember, she continued to "see clearly" where others saw and heard nothing.

Faint voices in the dusk, a whisper in darkness; perhaps in her bedroom the subtle intuition of another presence. And sometimes a touch on her arm, a breath on her cheek, delicate, exquisite — sometimes the haunting sweetness of some distant harmony, half heard, half divined. And now and then a form, usually unknown, almost always smiling and friendly, visible for a few moments — the space of a fire-fly's incandescence — then fading — entering her orbit out of nothing and, going into nothing, out of it.

Of these episodes she had never entertained any fear. Sometimes they interested her, sometimes even slightly amused her. But they had never saddened her, not even when they had been the flash-lit harbingers of death. For only a sense of calmness and serenity ac-

companied them: and to her they had always been part of the world and of life, nothing to wonder at, nothing to fear, and certainly nothing to intrude on — merely incidents not concerning her, not remarkable, but natural and requiring no explanation.

But she herself did not know and could not explain why, even as a child, she had been always reticent regarding these occurrences,— why she had always been disinclined to discuss them. Unless it were a natural embarrassment and a hesitation to discuss strangers, as though comment were a species of indelicacy,— even of unwarranted intrusion.

One night while reading — she had been scanning a newspaper column of advertisements hoping to find a chance for herself or Catharine — glancing up she again saw Clive's father seated near her. At the same moment he lifted his head, which had been resting on one hand, and looked across the hearthstone at her, smiling faintly.

Entirely unembarrassed, conscious of that atmosphere of serenity which always was present when such visitors arrived, the girl sat looking at what her eyes told her she perceived, a slight and friendly smile curving her lips in silent response.

Presently she became aware that Hafiz, too, saw the visitor, and was watching him. But this fact she had noticed before, and it did not surprise her.

And that was all there was to the incident. He rose, walked to the window, stood there. And after a little while he was not there. That ended it. And Hafiz went to sleep again.

CHAPTER XIII

IN September Athalie Greensleeve wrote her last letter to Clive Bailey. It began with a page or two of shyly solicitous inquiries concerning his well-being, his happiness, his plans; did not refer to his long silence; did refer to his anticipated return; did not mention her own accumulating domestic and financial embarrassments and the successive strokes of misfortune dealt her by those twin and formidable bravos, Fate and Chance; but did mention and enumerate everything that had occurred in her life which bore the slightest resemblance to a blessing.

Her letter continued:

"My sisters Doris and Catharine have gone into vaudeville with a very pretty act called 'April Rain.'

"That they had decided to do this and had been rehearsing it came as a complete surprise to me. Genevieve Hunting is also in it, and a man named Max Klepper who wrote the piece including lyrics and music.

"They opened at the Old Dominion Theatre, remained there a week, and then started West. Which makes it a trifle lonely for me; but I don't really mind if they only keep well and are successful and happy in their venture. Their idea and their desire, of course, is to return to New York at the earliest opportunity. But nobody seems to have any idea how soon that may

happen. Meanwhile the weather is cooler and Hafiz remains well and adorable.

"I have been out very little except to look for a position. Mr. Wahlbaum is dead and I left the store. Sunday morning I took a few flowers to Mr. Wahlbaum's grave. He was very kind to me, Clive. In the afternoon I took a train to the Spring Pond Cemetery. Father's and mother's graves had been well cared for and were smoothly green. The four young oak trees I planted are growing nicely. Mother was fond of trees. I am sure she likes my little oaks.

"It was a beautiful, cool, sunny day; and after I left the Cemetery I walked along the well remembered road toward Spring Pond. It is not very far, but I had never been any nearer to it than the Cemetery since my sisters and I went away.

"Such odd sensations came over me as I walked alone there amid familiar scenes: and, curiously, everything seemed to have shrunk to miniature size — houses, fields, distances all seemed much less impressive. But the Bay was intensely blue; the grasses and reeds in the salt meadows were already tipped with a golden colour here and there; flocks of purple grackle and red-winged blackbirds rose, drifted, and settled, chattering and squealing among the cat-tails just as they used to do when I was a child; and the big, slow-sailing mouse-hawks drifted and glided over the pastures, and when they tipped sideways I could see the white moon-spot on their backs, just as I remembered to look for it when I was a little, little girl.

"And the odours, Clive! How the scent of the

August fields, of the crisp salt hay, seemed to grip at my heart! — all the subtle, evanescent odours characteristic of that part of Long Island seemed to gather, blend, and exhale for my particular benefit that afternoon.

"The old tavern appeared to me so much smaller, so much more weather-beaten and shabby than my recollection of it. The sign still hung there — 'Hotel Greensleeve' — and as I walked by it I looked up at the window of my mother's room. The blinds were closed; nobody appeared to be around. I don't know why, Clive, but it seemed to me that I must go in for a moment and take one more look at my mother's room. . . . I am glad I did. There was nobody to stop me. I went up the stairs on tip-toe and opened her door, and looked in. *She was there, sewing.*

"I went in very softly and sat down on the carpet by her chair. . . . It was the happiest moment I have known since she died.

"And when she was no longer there I rose and crept down the stairs and through the hallway to the bar; and peeped in. An old man sat there asleep by the empty stove. And after a moment I decided it was Mr. Ledlie. But he has grown old — old! — and I let him sleep on in the sunshine without disturbing him.

"It was the same stove where you and I sat and nibbled peach turnovers so many years ago. I wanted to see it again.

"So I went back to New York in the late golden afternoon feeling very peaceful and dreamy, — and a

trifle tired. And found Hafiz stretched on the lounge; and stretched myself out beside him, taking the drowsy, purring, spoiled thing into my arms. And went to sleep to dream of you who gave me Hafiz, my dear and beloved friend.

"Write me when you can; as often as you desire. Always your letters are welcome messengers.

"ATHALIE."

CHAPTER XIV

IN her letters Athalie never mentioned Captain Dane; not because she had anything to conceal regarding him or herself; but she seemed to be aware that any mention of that friendship might not evoke a sympathetic response from Clive.

So, in her last letter, as in the others, she had not spoken of Captain Dane. Yet, now, he was the only man with whom she ever went anywhere and whom she received at her own apartment.

He had a habit of striding in two or three evenings in a week,— a big, fair, broad-shouldered six-footer, with sun-narrowed eyes of arctic blue, a short blond moustache, and skin permanently burned by the unshadowed glare of many and tropic days.

They went about together on Sundays, usually; sometimes in hot weather to suburban restaurants for dinner and a breath of air, sometimes to roof gardens.

Why he lingered in town — for he seemed always to be at leisure — she did not know. And she wondered a little that he should elect to remain in the heat-cursed city whence everybody else she knew had fled.

Dane was a godsend to her. With him she went to the Bronx Zoological Park several times, intensely interested in what he had to say concerning the crea-

tures housed there, and shyly proud and delighted to meet the curators of the various departments who all seemed to know Dane and to be on terms of excellent fellowship with him.

With him she visited the various museums and art galleries; and went with him to concerts, popular and otherwise; and took long trolley rides with him on suffocating evenings when the poor slept on the grass in the parks and the slums, east and west, presented endless vistas of panting nakedness prostrate under a smouldering red moon.

Every diversion he offered her helped to sustain her courage; every time she lunched or dined with him meant more to her than he dreamed it meant. Because her savings were ebbing fast, and she had not yet been able to find employment.

Some things she would not do — write to her sisters for any financial aid; nor would she go to the office of her late employers and ask for any recommendation from Mr. Grossman which might help her to secure a position. Never could she bring herself to do either of these things, although the ugly countenance of necessity now began to stare her persistently in the face.

Also she was sensitive lest Dane suspect her need and offer aid. But how could he suspect? — with her pretty apartment filled with pretty things, and the luxurious Hafiz pervading everything with his incessant purring and his snowy plume of a tail waving fastidious contentment. He fared better than did his mistress, who denied herself that Hafiz might flourish that

same tail. And after a while the girl actually began to grow thinner from sheer lack of nourishment.

It never occurred to her to sell or pawn any of the furniture, silver, furs, rugs,— anything at all that Clive had given her. And there was one reason why she never would do it: she refused to consider anything he had given her as her own property to dispose of if she chose. For she had accepted these things from Clive only because it gave him pleasure to give. And what she possessed she regarded as his property held in trust. Nothing could have induced her to consider these things in any other light.

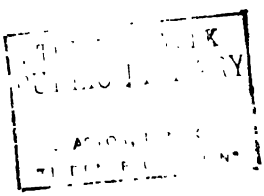
One souvenir, only, did she look upon as her own. It had no financial value; and, if it had, she would have starved before disposing of it. This was the first thing he ever gave her — his boy's offering — the gun-metal wrist-watch.

And her only recent extravagance had been a sentimental one; she had the watch cleaned and regulated, and a new leather strap adjusted. The evening it was returned to her she wore it; and that night she slept with the watch strapped to her wrist.

So much for a young girl's sentiment! — for no letter came from him on the morrow although the European mail was in. None came the next day; nor the next.

Toward the end of the week, one sultry evening, when Athalie returned from an unsuccessful tour of job-hunting, and nearer depression than ever she had yet been, Captain Dane came stalking in, shook hands with his usual decision, picked up Hafiz who adored him, and

"With him she visited the various museums and ar' galleries."



took the chair nearest to the lounge where Athalie lay.

"Suppose we dine somewhere?" he suggested, fondling the purring Angora and rubbing its ears.

"Would you mind," she said, "if I didn't?"

"You're very tired, aren't you, Miss Greensleeve?"

"A little. I don't believe I have the energy to go out with you."

Still fondling the willing cat he said: "What's wrong? Something's wrong, isn't it?"

"No indeed."

He turned and gave her a square look: "You're quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Oh; all right. Will you let me have dinner here with you?"

She said without embarrassment: "I neglected my marketing: there's very little in the pantry."

"Well," he said, "I'm hungry and I'm going to call up the Hotel Trebizond and have them send us some dinner."

She seemed inclined to demur, but he had his way, went to the telephone and gave his orders.

The dinner arrived in due time and was excellent. And when the remains of the dinner and the waiter who served it had been cleared out, Athalie felt better.

"You ought to go to the country for two or three weeks," he remarked.

"Why don't *you* go?" she asked, smilingly.

"Don't need it."

"Neither do I, Captain Dane. Besides I have to continue my search for a position."

"No luck yet?"

"Not yet."

He mused over his cigar for a few moments, lifted his blond head as though about to speak, but evidently decided not to.

She had taken up her sewing and was now busy with it. From moment to moment Hafiz took liberties with her spool of thread where he sprawled beside her, patting it this way and that until it fell upon the floor and Dane was obliged to rescue it.

It had grown cooler. A breeze from the open windows occasionally stirred her soft hair and the smoke of Dane's cigar. They had been silent for a few moments. Threading her needle she happened to glance up at him, and saw somebody else standing just behind him — a tall man, olive-skinned and black-bearded — and knew instantly that he was not alive.

Serenely incurious, she looked at the visitor, aware that the clothes he wore were foreign, and that his features, too, were not American.

And the next moment she gazed at him more attentively, for he had laid one hand on Dane's shoulder and was looking very earnestly across at her.

He said distinctly but with a foreign accent: "Would you please say to him that the greatest of all the ancient cities is hidden by the jungle near the source of the middle fork. It was called Yhdunez."

"Yes," she said, unconscious that she had spoken aloud.

Dane lifted his head, and remained motionless, gazing at her intently. The visitor was already moving across the room. Halfway across he looked back at Athalie in a pleasant, questioning manner; and she nodded her reassurance with a smile. Then her visitor was there no longer; and she found herself, a trifle confused, looking into the keen eyes of Captain Dane.

Neither spoke for a moment or two; then he said, quietly: "I did not know you were clairvoyant."

"I — see clearly — now and then."

"I understand. It is nothing new to me."

"You *do* understand then?"

"I understand that some few people see more clearly than the great majority."

"Do you?"

"No. . . . There was a comrade of mine — a Frenchman — Jacques Renouf. He was like you; he saw."

"Is he living? — I mean as we are?"

"No."

"Was he tall, olive-skinned, black-bearded —"

"Yes," said Dane coolly; "did you see him just now?"

"Yes."

"I wondered. . . . There are moments when I seem to feel his presence. I was thinking of him just now. We were on the upper Amazon together last winter."

"How did he die?"

"He'd been off by himself all day. About five o'clock he came into camp with a poisoned arrow

broken off behind his shoulder-blade. He seemed dazed and stupefied; but at moments I had an idea that he was trying to tell us something."

Dane hesitated, shrugged: "It was no use. We left our fire as usual and went into the forest about two miles to sleep. Jacques died that night, still dazed by the poison, still making feeble signs at me as though he were trying to tell me something. . . . I believe that he has been near me very often since, trying to speak to me."

"He laid his hand on your shoulder, Captain Dane."

Dane's stern lips quivered for a second, then self-command resumed control. He said: "He usually did that when he had something to tell me. . . . Did he speak to me, Miss Greensleeve?"

"He spoke to me."

"Clearly?"

"Yes. He said: 'Would you please say to him that the greatest of all the ancient cities is hidden by the jungle near the source of the middle fork. It was called Yhdunez.'"

For a long while Dane sat silent, his chin resting on his clenched hand, looking down at the rug at his feet. After a while he said, still looking down: "He must have found it all alone. And got an arrow in him for his reward. . . . They're a dirty lot, those cannibals along the middle fork of the Amazon. Nobody knows much about them yet except that they *are* cannibals and their arrows are poisoned. . . . I brought back the arrow that I pulled out of Jacques.

. . . There's no analysis that can determine what the poison is — except that it's vegetable."

He leaned forward, as though weary, resting his face between both hands.

"Yhdunez? Is that what it was called? Well, it and everything in it was not worth the life of my friend Renouf. . . . Nor is anything I've ever seen worth a single life sacrificed to the Red God of Discovery. . . . Those accursed cities full of vile and monstrous carvings — they belong to the jaguars now. Let them keep them. Let the world's jungles keep their own — if only they'd give me back my friend —"

He rested a moment as he was, then straightened up impatiently as though ashamed.

"Death is death," he said in matter-of-fact tones.

Athalie slowly shook her head: "There is no death."

He nodded almost gratefully: "I know what you mean. I dare say you are right. . . . Well — I think I'll go back to Yhdunez."

"Not this evening?" she protested, smilingly.

He smiled, too: "No, not this evening, Miss Greensleeve. I shall never care to go anywhere again —" . . . His face altered. . . . "Unless you care to go — with me."

What he had said she would have taken gaily, lightly, had not the gravity of his face forbidden it. She saw the lean muscles tighten along his clean-cut cheek, saw the keen eyes grow wistful, then steady themselves for her answer.

She could not misunderstand him; she disdained to,

honouring the simplicity and truth of this man to whom she was so truly devoted.

Her abandoned sewing lay on her lap. Hafiz slept with one velvet paw entangled in her thread. She looked down, absently freeing thread and fabric, and remained so for a moment, thinking. After a while she looked up, a trifle pale:

"Thank you, Captain Dane," she said in a low voice.

He waited.

"I — am afraid that I am — in love — already — with another man."

He bent his head, quietly; there was no pleading, no asking for a chance, no whining of any species to which the monarch man is so constitutionally predisposed when soft, young lips pronounce the death warrant of his sentimental hopes.

All he said was: "It need not alter anything between us — what I have asked of you."

"It only makes me care the more for our friendship, Captain Dane."

He nodded, studying the pattern in the Shirvan rug under his feet. A procession of symbols representing scorpions and tarantulas embellished one of the rug's many border stripes. His grave eyes followed the procession entirely around the five-by-three bit of weaving. Then he rose, bent over her, took her slim hand in silence, saluted it, and asking if he might call again very soon, went out about his business, whatever it was. Probably the most important business he had on hand just then was to get over his love for Athalie Greensleeve.

For a long while Athalie sat there beside Hafiz considering the world and what it was threatening to do to her; considering man and what he had offered and what he had not offered to do to her.

Distressed because of the pain she had inflicted on Captain Dane, yet proud of the honour done her, she sat thinking, sometimes of Clive, sometimes of Mr. Wahlbaum, sometimes of Doris and Catharine, and of her brother who had gone out to the coast years ago, and from whom she had never heard.

But mostly she thought of Clive — and of his long silence.

Presently Hafiz woke up, stretched his fluffy, snowy limbs, yawned, pink-mouthed, then looked up out of gem-clear eyes, blinking inquiringly at his young mistress.

"Hafiz," she said, "if I don't find employment very soon, what is to become of you?"

The evening paper, as yet unread, lay on the sofa beside her. She picked it up, listlessly, glancing at the headings of the front page columns. There seemed to be trouble in Mexico; trouble in Japan; trouble in Hayti. Another column recorded last night's heat and gave the list of deaths and prostrations in the city. Another column — the last on the front page — announced by cable the news of a fashionable engagement — a Miss Winifred Stuart to a Mr. Clive Bailey; both at present in Paris —

She read it again, slowly; and even yet it meant nothing to her, conveyed nothing she seemed able to comprehend.

But halfway down the column her eyes blurred, the paper slipped from her hands to the floor, and she dropped back into the hollow of the sofa, and lay there, unstirring. And Hafiz, momentarily disturbed, curled up on her lap again and went peacefully to sleep.

CHAPTER XV

TO her sisters Athalie wrote:

"For reasons of economy, and other reasons, I have moved to 1006 West Fifty-fifth Street where I have the top floor. I think that you both can find accommodations in this house when you return to New York.

"So far I have not secured a position. Please don't think I am discouraged. I do hope that you are well and successful."

Their address, at that time, was Vancouver, B. C.

To Clive Bailey, Jr., his agent wrote:

"Miss Athalie Greensleeve called at the office this morning and returned the keys to the apartment which she has occupied.

"Miss Greensleeve explained to me a fact of which I had not been aware, viz.: that the furniture, books, hangings, pictures, porcelains, rugs, clothing, furs, bed and table linen, silver, etc., etc., belong to you and not to her as I had supposed.

"I have compared the contents of the apartment with the minute inventory given me by Miss Green-

sleeve. Everything is accounted for; all is in excellent order.

"I have, therefore, locked up the apartment, pending orders from you regarding its disposition,"— etc., etc.

The tall shabby house in Fifty-fourth Street was one of a five-storied row built by a speculator to attract fashion many years before. Fashion ignored the bait.

A small square of paper which had once been white was pasted on the brick front just over the tarnished door-bell. On it was written in ink: "Furnished Rooms."

Answering in person the first advertisement she had turned to in the morning paper Athalie had found this place. There was nothing attractive about it except the price; but that was sufficient in this emergency. For the girl would not permit herself to remain another night in the pretty apartment furnished for her by the man whose engagement had been announced to her through the daily papers.

And nothing of his would she take with her except the old gun-metal wrist-watch, and Hafiz, and the barred basket in which Hafiz had arrived. Everything else she left, her toilet silver, desk-set, her evening gowns and wraps, gloves, negligées, boudoir caps, slippers, silk stockings, all her bath linen, everything that she herself had not purchased out of her own salary — even the little silver cupid holding aloft his torch, which had been her night-light.

"With a basket containing Hafiz, her suit-case, and a furled umbrella she started for her

Never again could she illuminate that torch. The other woman must do that.

She went about quietly from room to room, lowering the shades and drawing the curtains. There was brilliant colour in her cheeks, an undimmed beauty in her eyes; pride crowned the golden head held steady and high on its slender, snowy neck. Only the lips threatened betrayal; and were bitten as punishment into immobility.

Her small steamer trunk went by a rickety private express for fifty cents: with the basket containing Hafiz, her suit-case, and a furled umbrella she started for her new lodgings.

Michael, opening the lower grille for her, stammered: "God knows why ye do this, Miss! Th' young Masther'll be afther givin' me the sack av ye lave the house unbeknowns't him!"

"I can't stay, Michael. He knows I can't. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye Miss! God be good to ye — an' th' pusheen —!" laying a huge but gentle paw on Hafiz's basket whence a gentle plaint arose.

And so Athalie and Hafiz departed into the world together; and presently bivouacked; their first étape on life's long journey ending on the top floor of 1006 West Fifty-fifth Street.

The landlady was a thin, anxious, and very common woman with false hair and teeth; and evidently determined to secure Athalie for a lodger.

But the terms she offered the girl for the entire top

floor were so absurdly small that Athalie hesitated, astonished and perplexed.

"Oh, there's a jinx in the place," said the landlady; "I ain't aiming to deceive nobody, and I'll tell you the God-awful truth. If I don't," she added naïvely, "somebody else is sure to hand it to you and you'll get sore on me and quit."

"What *is* the matter with the apartment?" inquired the girl uneasily.

"I'll tell you: the lady that had it went dead on me last August."

"Is that all?"

"No, dearie. It was chloral. And of course, the papers got hold of it and nobody wants the apartment. That's why you get it cheap — if you'll take it and chase out the jinx that's been wished on me. Will you, dearie?"

"I don't know," said the girl, looking around at the newly decorated and cheerful rooms.

The landlady sniffed: "It certainly was one on me when I let that jinx into my house — to have her go dead on me and all like that."

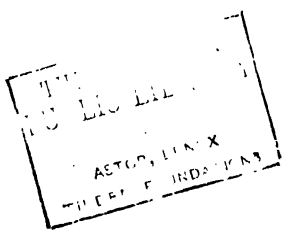
"Poor thing," murmured Athalie, partly to herself.

"No, she wasn't poor. You ought to have seen her rings! Them's what got her into trouble, dearie; — and the roll she flashed."

"Wasn't it suicide?" asked Athalie.

"I gotta tell you the truth. No, it wasn't. She was feeling fine and dandy. Business had went good. . . . There was a young man to visit her that even-

"'Wasn't it suicide?' asked Athalie."


ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

ing. I seen him go up the stairs. . . . But I was that sleepy I went to bed. So I didn't see him come down. And next day at noon when I went up to do the room she lay dead onto the floor, and her rings gone, and the roll missing out of her stocking."

"Did the man kill her?"

"Yes, dearie. And the papers had it. That's what put me in Dutch. I gotta be honest with *you*. You'd hear it, anyway."

"But how could he give her chloral —"

The anxious, excited little woman's volubility could suffer restraint no longer:

"Oh, he could dope her easy in the dark!" she burst out. "Not that the house ain't thur'ly respectable as far as I can help it, and all my lodgers is refined. No, Miss Greensleeve, I won't stand for nothing that ain't refined and genteel. Only what can a honest woman do when she's abed and asleep, what with all the latch keys and entertainin', and things like that? No, Miss Greensleeve, I ain't got myself to blame, being decent and law-abiding and all like that, what with the police keeping tabs and the neighbourhood not being Fifth Avenoo either! — and this jinx wished on me —"

"Please —"

"Oh, I suppose you ain't a-goin' to stay here now that you've learned all about these goin's on and all like that —"

"*Please* wait!" — for the voluble landlady was already beginning to sniffle; — "I am perfectly willing

to stay, Mrs. Meehan,— if you will promise to be a little patient about my rent until I secure a position —"

"Oh, I will, Miss Greensleeve! I ain't plannin' to press you none! I know how it is with money and with young ladies. Easy come, easy go! Just give me what you can. I ain't fixed any too good myself, what with butchers and bakers and rent owed me and all like that. I guess I can trust you to act fair and square —"

"Yes; I am square — so far."

Mrs. Meehan began to sob, partly with relief, partly with a general tendency to sentimental hysteria: "I can see that, dearie. And say — if you're quiet, I ain't peekin' around corners and through key-holes. No, Miss Greensleeve; that ain't my style! Quiet behaved young ladies can have their company without me saying nothing to nobody. All I ask is that no lady will cut up flossy in any shape, form, or manner, but behave genteel and refined to one and all. I don't want no policeman in the area. That ain't much to ask, is it?" she gasped, fairly out of breath between eloquence and tears.

"No," said Athalie with a faint smile, "it isn't much to ask."

And so the agreement was concluded; Mrs. Meehan brought in fresh linen for bed and bathroom, pulled out the new bureau drawers and dusted them, carried away a few anæmic geraniums in pots, and swept the new hardwood floor with a dry mop, explaining that the entire apartment had been renovated and redec-

orated since the tragic episode of last August, and that all the furniture was brand new.

"Her trunks and clothes and all like that was took by the police," explained Mrs. Meehan, "but she left some rubbish behind a sliding panel which they didn't find. I found it and I put it on the top shelf in the closet —"

She dragged a chair thither, mounted it, and presently came trotting back to the front room, carrying in both arms a bulky box of green morocco and a large paper parcel bursting with odds and ends of tinsel and silk. These she dumped on the centre table, saying: "She had a cabinet-maker fix up a cupboard in the baseboard, and that's where she kept gimcracks. The police done me damage enough without my showin' them her hidin' place and the things she kept there. Here — I'll show it to you! It's full of keys and electric wires and switches —"

She took Athalie by the arm and drew her over to the west side of the room.

"You can't see nothing there, can you?" she demanded, pointing at the high wainscoting of dull wood polished by age.

Athalie confessed she could not.

"Look!"

Mrs. Meehan passed her bony hand along the panels until her work-worn forefinger rested on a polished knot in the richly grained wood. Then she pushed; and the entire square of panels swung outward, lowering like a drawbridge, and presently rested flat on the floor.

"How odd!" exclaimed Athalie, kneeling to see better.

What she saw was a cupboard lined with asbestos, and an elaborate electric switchboard set with keys from which innumerable insulated wires radiated, entering tubes that disappeared in every direction.

"What are all these for?" she asked, rising to her feet.

"Dearie, I've got to be honest with *you*. This here lady was a meejum."

"A — what?"

"A meejum."

"What is that?"

"Why don't you know, dearie? She threw trances for twenty per. She seen things. She done stunts with tables and tambourines and accordions. Why this here place is all wired and fixed up between the walls and the ceiling and roof and the flooring, too. There is chimes and bells and harmonicas and mechanical banjos under the flooring and in the walls and ceiling. There's a whispering phonograph, too, and something that sighs and sobs. Also a machine that is full of singing birds that pipe up just as sweet and soft and natural as can be.

"On rainy days you can amuse yourself with them keys; I don't like to fool with them myself, being nervous with a weak back and my vittles not setting right and all like that —" Again she ran down from sheer lack of breath.

Athalie gazed curiously at the secret cupboard. After a few moments she bent over, lifted and replaced

the panelling and passed her slim hand over the wainscot, thoughtfully.

"So the woman was a trance-medium," she said, half to herself.

"Yes, Miss Greensleeve. She read the stars, too, and she done cards on the side; you know — all about a blond gentleman that wants to meet you and a dark lady comin' over the water to do something mean to you. She charged high, but she had customers enough — swell ladies, too, in their automobiles, and old gentlemen and young and all like that. . . . Here's part of her outfit"— leading Athalie to the centre table and opening the green morocco box.

In the box was a slim bronze tripod and a big sphere of crystal. Mrs. Meehan placed the tripod on the table and set the crystal sphere upon it, saying dubiously: "She claimed that she could see things in that. I guess it was part of her game. I ain't never seen nothing into that glass ball, and I've looked, too. You can have it if you want it. It's kind of cute to set on the mantel."

She began to paw and grub and rummage in the big paper parcel, scratching about in the glittering mess of silk and embroidery with a pertinacity entirely gallinaceous.

"You can have these, too," she said to Athalie — "if you want 'em. They're heathen I guess —" holding up some tawdry Japanese and home-made Chinese finery.

But Athalie declined the dead woman's robes of office and Mrs. Meehan rolled them up in the wrapping

paper and took them and herself off, very profuse in her gratitude to Athalie for consenting to occupy the apartment and thereby remove the "jinx" that had inhabited it since the tragedy of the month before.

A very soft and melancholy mew from the basket informed the girl that Hafiz desired his liberty. So she let him out and he trotted at her heels as she walked about inspecting the apartment. Also he did considerable inspecting on his own account, sniffing at every door-sill and crack, jumping up on chairs to look out of windows, prowling in and out of closets, his plumy tail jerking with dubiousness and indecision.

The apartment was certainly clean. Evidently the house had been a good one in its day, for the trim was dark old mahogany, rich and beautiful in colour; and the fireplace was rather pretty with its acanthus leaves and roses deeply carved in marble which time had toned to an ivory tint.

The darkly stained floor of hardwood was, of course, modern. So were the new and very hideous oriental rugs made in Hoboken, and the aniline pink wall-paper, and the brand new furniture still smelling of department store varnish. Hideous, too, were the electric fixtures, the gas-log in the old-time fireplace, and the bargain counter bric-a-brac geometrically spaced upon the handsome old mantel.

But there were possibilities in the big, square room facing south and in the two smaller bed chambers fronting the north. A modern bathroom connected these.

To find an entire top floor in New York at such a

price was as amazing as it was comfortable to the girl who had not expected to be able to afford more than a small bedroom.

She had a little money left, enough to purchase food and a few pots and pans to cook it over the gas range in one of the smaller rooms.

And here she and Hafiz had their first meal on the long world-trail stretching away before her. After which she sat for a while by the window in a stiff arm-chair, thinking of Clive and of his silence, and of the young girl he was one day to marry.

Southward, the lights of the city began to break out and sparkle through the autumn haze; tall towers, hitherto invisible, suddenly glimmered against the sky-line. A double vista of lighted street lamps stretched east and west below her.

The dusty-violet light of evening softened the shabby street below, veiling ugliness and squalor and subtly transmuting meanness and poverty to picturesqueness — as artists, using only the flattering simplicity of essentials, show us in etching and aquarelle the romance of the commonplace. And so the rusty iron balconies of a chop suey across the street became quaint and curious: dragon and swinging gilded sign, banner and garish fretwork grew mellow and mysterious under the ruddy Hunter's Moon sailing aloft out of the city's haze like a great Chinese lantern.

From an unseen steeple or two chimes sounded the hour. Farther away in the city a bell answered. It is not a city of belfries and chimes; only locally and

she herself was concerned; that they who see clearly can never use that vision to help themselves.

Fiercely she resented it,— the more bitterly because for the first time in her life she had condescended to any voluntary effort toward clairvoyance.

Wearily she sat up on the floor and gathered her knees into her arms, staring at nothing there in the darkness while the slow tears fell.

Never before had she known loneliness. A man had made her understand it. Never before had she known bitterness. A man had taught it to her. Never again should any man do what this man had done to her! She was learning resentment.

All men should be the same to her hereafter. All men should stand already condemned. Never again should one among them betray her mind to reveal itself, persuade her heart to response, her lips to sacrifice their sweetness and their pride, her soul to stir in its sleep, awake, and answer. And for what the minds and hearts of men might bring upon themselves, let men be responsible. Their inclinations, offers, protests, promises as far as they regarded herself could never again affect her. Let man look to himself; his desires no longer concerned her. Let him keep his distance — or take his chances. And there were no chances.

Athalie was learning resentment.

Somebody was knocking. Athalie rose from the floor, turned on the lights, dried her eyes, went slowly to the door, and opened it.

A large, fat, pallid woman stood in the hallway. Her eyes were as washed out as her faded, yellowish hair; and her kimono needed washing.

"Good evening," she said cordially, coming in without any encouragement from Athalie and settling her uncorseted bulk in the arm-chair. "My name is Grace Bellmore,— Mrs. Grace Bellmore. I have the rear rooms under yours. If you're ever lonely come down and talk it over. Neighbours are not what they might be in this house. Look out for the Meehan, too. I'd call her a cat only I like cats. Say, that's a fine one on your bed there. Persian? Oh, Angora —" here she fished out a cigarette from the pocket of her wrapper, found a match, scratched it on the sole of her ample slipper, and lighted her cigarette.

"Have one?" she inquired. "No? Don't like them? Oh, well, you'll come to 'em. Everything comes easy when you're lonely. *I* know. You don't have to tell me. God! I get so sick of my own company sometimes —"

She turned her head to gaze about her, twisting her heavy, creased neck as far as the folds of fat permitted: "You had your nerve with you when you took this place. I knew Mrs. Del Garmo. I warned her, too. But she was a bone-head. A woman can't be careless in this town. And when it comes to men — say, Miss Greensleeve, I want to know their names before they ask me to dinner and start in calling me Grace. It's Grace *after* meat with *me!*" And she laughed and laughed, slapping her fat knee with a pudgy, ring-laden hand.

Athalie, secretly dismayed, forced a polite smile. Mrs. Bellmore blew a few smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"Are you in business, Miss Greensleeve?"

"Yes. . . . I am looking for a position."

"What a pretty voice — and refined way of speaking!" exclaimed Mrs. Bellmore frankly. "I guess you've seen better days. Most people have. Tell you the truth, though, I haven't. I'm better off than I ever was before. Of course this is the dull season, but things are picking up. What is your line, Miss Greensleeve?"

"Stenographer."

"Oh! Well, I don't suppose I could do anything for you, could I?"

"I don't know what your business is," ventured Athalie, who, heretofore had not dared even to surmise what might be the vocation of this very large and faded woman who wore a pink kimono and a dozen rings on her nicotine-stained fingers, and who smoked incessantly.

The woman seemed to be a trifle surprised: "Haven't you ever heard of Grace Bellmore?" she asked.

"I don't think so," said Athalie with increasing diffidence.

"Well, maybe you wouldn't, not being in the profession. The managers all know me. I run an Emergency Agency on Broadway."

"I don't think I understand," said the girl.

"No? Then it's like this: a show gets stuck and needs a quick study. They call me up and I throw them

what they want at an hour's notice. They can always count on me for anything from wardrobe mistress to prima donna. That's how I get mine," she concluded with a jolly laugh.

Athalie, feeling a little more confidence in her visitor, smiled at her.

"Say — you're a beauty!" exclaimed Mrs. Bellmore, gazing at her. "You're all there, too. I could place you easy if you ever need it. You don't sing, do you?"

"No."

"Ever had your voice tried?"

"No."

"Dance?"

"I dance — whatever is being danced — rather easily."

"No stage experience?"

"No."

"Well — what do you say, Miss Greensleeve?"

Athalie coloured and laughed: "Thank you, but I had rather work at stenography."

Mrs. Bellmore said: "I certainly hate to admit it, and knock my own profession, but any good stenographer in a year makes more than many a star you read about. . . . Unless there's men putting up for her."

Athalie nodded gravely.

"All the same you'd make a peach of a show-girl," added Mrs. Bellmore regretfully. And, after a rather intent interval of silent scrutiny: "You're a *good* girl, too. . . . Say, you *do* get pretty lonely sometimes, don't you, dear?"

Athalie flushed and shook her head. Mrs. Bellmore lighted another cigarette from the smouldering remnant of the previous one, and flung the gilt-tipped remains through the window.

"Ten to one it hits a crook if it hits anybody," she remarked. "This is a fierce neighbourhood,— all sorts of joints, and then some. But I like my rooms. I don't guess you'll be bothered. A girl is more likely to get spoken to in the swell part of town. Well,—" she struggled to her fat feet—"I'll be going. If you're lonely, drop in during the evening. I'm at the office all day except Sundays and holidays."

They stood, confronted, looking at each other for a moment. Then, impulsively the fat woman offered her hand:

"Don't be afraid of me," she said. "I may look crooked, but I'm not. Your mother wouldn't mind my knowing you."

She held Athalie's narrow hand for a moment, and the girl looked into the faded eyes.

"Thank you for coming," she said. "I *was* lonely."

"Good girls usually are. It's a hell of an alternative, isn't it? I don't mean to be profane; hell is the word. It's hell either way for a girl alone."

Athalie nodded silently. Mrs. Bellmore looked at her, then glanced around the room, curiously.

"Hello," she said abruptly, "what's that?"

Athalie's eyes followed hers: "Do you mean the crystal?"

"Yes. . . . Say—" she turned to Athalie, nodding profound emphasis on every word she uttered:—"Say,

I *thought* there was something else to you — something I couldn't quite get next to. Now I know what's been bothering me about you. You're clairvoyant!"

Athalie's cheeks grew warm: "I am not a medium," she said. "That crystal is not my own."

"That may be. Maybe you don't think you are a medium. But you are, Miss Greensleeve. *I* know. I'm a little that way, too,— just a very little. Oh, I could go into the business and fake it of course,— like all the others — or most of them. But you are the real thing. Why," she exclaimed in vexation, "didn't I know it as soon as I laid eyes on you? I certainly was subconscious of something. Why you could do anything you pleased with the power you have if you'd care to learn the business. There's money in it — take it from me!"

Athalie said, after a few moments of silence: "I don't think I understand. Is there a way of — of developing clear vision?"

"Haven't you ever tried?"

"Never. . . . Except when a little while ago I went over to the crystal and — and tried to find — somebody."

"Did you find — that person?"

"No."

Mrs. Bellmore shook her fat head: "You needn't tell me any more. You can't ever do yourself any good by crystal gazing — you poor child."

Athalie's head dropped.

"No, it's no use," said the other. "If you go into the business and play square you can sometimes help

others. But I guess the crystal is mostly fake. Mrs. Del Garmo had one like yours. She admitted to me that she never saw anything in it until she hypnotised herself. And she could do that by looking steadily at a brass knob on a bed-post; and see as much in it as in her crystal."

The fat woman lighted another cigarette and blew a contemplative whiff toward the crystal: "No: at best the game is a crooked one, even for the few who have really any occult power."

"Why?" asked the girl, surprised.

"Because they are usually clever, nimble-witted, full of intuition. Deduction is an instinct with them. And it is very easy to elaborate from a basis of truth;—it's more than a temptation to intelligence to complete a story desired and already paid for by a client. Because almost invariably the client is as stupid as the medium is intelligent. And, take it from me, it's impossible not to use your intelligence when a partly finished business deal requires it."

Athalie was silent.

"*I'd* do it," laughed Mrs. Bellmore.

Athalie said nothing.

"Say, on the level," said the older woman, "do you see a lot that we others can't see, Miss Greensleeve?"

"I have seen — some things."

"Plenty, too, I'll bet! Oh, it's in your pretty face, in your eyes!—it's in you, all about you. I'm not much in that line but I can feel it in the air. Why I felt it as soon as I came into your room, but I was that stupid — thinking of Mrs. Del Garmo — and never

associating it with you! . . . Do you do any trance work?"

"No. . . . I have never cultivated — anything of that sort."

"I know. The really gifted don't cultivate the power as a rule. Only one now and then, and here and there. The others are pure frauds — almost every one of them. But —" she looked searchingly at the girl,—"you're no fraud! Why you're full of it! — full — saturated — alive with — with vitality — psychical and physical! — You're a glorious thing — half spiritual, half human — a superb combination of vitality, sacred and profane!"— She checked herself and turned on the girl almost savagely: "Who was the fool of a man you were looking for in the crystal? . . . Very well; don't tell then. I didn't suppose you would. Only — God help him for the fool he is — and forgive him for what he has done to you! . . . And may I never enter this room again and find you with the tears freshly scrubbed out of the most honest eyes God ever gave a woman! . . . Good night, Miss Greensleeve!"

"Good night," said Athalie.

After she had closed the door and locked it she turned back into the empty room, moving uncertainly as though scarcely knowing what she was about. And then, suddenly, the terror of utter desolation seized her, and for the first time she realised what Clive had been to her, *and what he had not been* — understood for the first time in her life the complex miracle called love, its synthesis, its every element, every molecule,

every atom, and flung herself across the bed, half strangled, sobbing out her passion and her grief.

Dawn found her lying there; but the ravage of that night had stripped her of much that she had been, and never again would be. And what had been taken from her was slowly being replaced by what she had never yet been. Night stripped her; the red dawn clothed her.

She sat up, dry-eyed, unbound her hair, flung from her the crumpled negligée. Presently the first golden-pink ray of the rising sun fell across her snowy body, and she flung out her lovely arms to it as though to draw it into her empty heart.

Hafiz, blinking his jewelled eyes, watched her lazily from his pillow.

CHAPTER XVI

AS she came, pensively, from her morning bath into the sunny front room Athalie noticed the corner of an envelope projecting from beneath her door.

For one heavenly moment the old delight surprised her at sight of Clive's handwriting,— for one moment only, before an overwhelming reaction scoured her heart of tenderness and joy; and the terrible resurgence of pain and grief wrung a low cry from her: "Why couldn't he let me alone!" And she crumpled the letter fiercely in her clenched hand.

Minute after minute she stood there, her white hand tightening as though to strangle the speech written there on those crushed sheets — perhaps to throttle and silence the faint, persistent cry of her own heart pleading a hearing for the man who had written to her at last.

And after a while her nerveless hand relaxed; she looked down at the crushed thing in her palm for a long time before she smoothed it out and finally opened it.

He wrote:

"It is too long a story to go into in detail. I couldn't, anyway. My mother had desired it for a

long time. I have nothing to say about it except this: I would not for all the world have had you receive the first information from the columns of a newspaper. Of that part of it I have a right to speak, because the announcement was made without my knowledge or consent. And I'll say more: it was made even before I myself was aware that an engagement existed.

"Don't mistake what I write you, Athalie. I am not trying to escape any responsibility excepting that of premature publicity. Whatever else has happened I am fully responsible for.

"And so — what can I have to say to you, Athalie? Silence were decenter perhaps — God knows! — and He knows, too, that in me he fashioned but an irresolute character, void of the initial courage of conviction, without deep and sturdy belief, unsteady to a true course set, and lacking in rugged purpose.

"It is not stupidity: in the bottom of my own heart I *know!* Custom, habit, acquired and inculcated acquiescence in unanalysed beliefs — these require more than irresolution and a negative disposition to fight them and overcome them.

"Athalie, the news you must have read in the newspapers should first have come from me. Among many, many debts I must ever owe you, that one at least was due you. And I defaulted; but not through any fault of mine.

"I could not rest until you knew this. Whatever you may think about me now — however lightly you weigh me — remember this — if you ever remember me at all in the years to come: I was aware of my para-

mount debt: I should have paid it had the opportunity not been taken out of my own hands. And that debt paramount was to inform you first of anybody concerning what you read in a public newspaper.

"Now there remains nothing more for me to say that you would care to hear. You would no longer care to know,— would probably not believe me if I should tell you what you have been to me — and still are — and still are, Athalie! Athalie! —"

The letter ended there with her name. She kept it all day; but that night she destroyed it. And it was a week before she wrote him:

"— Thank you for your letter, Clive. I hope all is well with you and yours. I wish you happiness; I desire for you all things good. And also — for *her*. Surely I may say this much without offence — when I am saying good-bye forever.

"ATHALIE."

In due time, to this came his answer, tragic in its brevity, terrible in its attempt to say nothing — so that its stiff cerement of formality seemed to crack with every written word and its platitudes split open under the fierce straining of the living and unwritten words beneath them.

And to this she made no answer. And destroyed it after the sun had set.

Her money was now about gone. Indian summer brought no prospect of employment. Never had she believed that so many stenographers existed in the

world; never had she supposed that vacant positions could be so pitifully few.

During October her means had not afforded her proper nourishment.

The vigour of young womanhood demands more than milk and crackers and a rare slab from some delicatessen shop.

As for Hafiz, to his astonishment he had been introduced to chuck-steak; and the pleasure was anything but unmitigated. But chuck-steak was more than his mistress had.

Mrs. Bellmore was inclined to eat largely of late suppers prepared on an oil stove by her own fair and very fat hands.

Athalie accepted one or two invitations, and then accepted no more, being unable to return anybody's hospitality.

Captain Dane called persistently without being received, until she wrote him not to come again until she sent for him.

Nobody else knew where she was except her sisters. Doris wrote from Los Angeles complaining of slack business. Later Catharine wrote asking for money. And Athalie was obliged to answer that she had none.

Now "none" means not any at all. And the time had now arrived when that was the truth. The chuck-steak cut up on Hafiz's plate in the bathroom had been purchased with postage stamps — the last of a sheet bought by Athalie in days of affluence for foreign correspondence.

There was no more foreign correspondence. Hence

the chuck-steak, and a bottle of milk in the sink and a packet of biscuits on the shelf. And a rather pale, young girl lying flat on the lounge in the front room, her blue eyes wide, staring up at the fading sun-beams on the ceiling.

If she was desperate she was quiet about it — perhaps even at moments a little incredulous that there actually could be nothing left for her to live on. It was one of those grotesque episodes that did not seem to belong in her life — something which ought not — that could not happen to her. At moments, however, she realised that it had happened — realised that part of the nightmare had been happening for some time — that for a good while now, she had always been more or less hungry, even after a rather reckless orgy on crackers and milk.

Except that she felt a little fatigued there was in her no tendency to accept the *chose arrivée*, no acquiescence in the *fait accompli*, nothing resembling any bowing of the head, any meek desire to kiss the rod; only a still resentment, a quiet but steady anger, the new and cool opportunism that hatches recklessness.

What channel should she choose? That was all that chance had left for her to decide,— merely what form her recklessness should take.

Whatever of morality had been instinct in the girl now seemed to be in absolute abeyance. In the extremity of dire necessity, cornered at last, face to face with a world that threatened her, and watching it now out of cool, intelligent eyes, she had, without realising it, slipped back into her ragged childhood.

There was nothing else to slip back to, no training, no discipline, no foundation other than her companionship with a mother whom she had loved but who had scarcely done more for her than to respond vaguely to the frankness of inquiring childhood.

Her childhood had been always a battle — a happy series of conflicts as she remembered — always a fight among strenuous children to maintain her feet in her little tattered shoes against rough aggression and ruthless competition.

And now, under savage pressure, she slipped back again in spirit to the school-yard, and became a watchful, agile, unmoral thing again — a creature bent on its own salvation, dedicated to its own survival, atrociously ready for any emergency, undismayed by anything that might offer itself, and ready to consider, weigh, and determine any chance for existence.

Almost every classic alternative in turn presented itself to her as she lay there considering. She could go out and sell herself. But, oddly enough, the "easiest way" was not easy for her. And, as a child, also, a fastidious purity had been instinctive in her, both in body and mind.

There were other and easier alternatives; she could go on the stage, or into domestic service, or she could call up Captain Dane and tell him she was hungry. Or she could let any one of several young men understand that she was now permanently receptive to dinner invitations. And she could, if she chose, live on her personal popularity,— be to one man or to several

une maitresse vierge — manage, contrive, accept, give nothing of consequence.

For she was a girl to flatter the vanity of men; and she knew that if ever she coolly addressed her mind to it she could rule them, entangle them, hold them sufficiently long, and flourish without the ultimate concession, because there were so many, many men in the world, and it took each man a long, long time to relinquish hope; and always there was another ready to try his fortune, happy in his vanity to attempt where all so far had failed.

Something she *had* to do; that was certain. And it happened, while she was pondering the problem, that the only thing she had not considered,— had not even thought of — was now abruptly presented to her.

For, as she lay there thinking, there came the sound of footsteps outside her door, and presently somebody knocked. And Athalie rose in the dusk of the room, switched on a single light, went to the door and opened it. And opportunity walked in wearing the shape of an elderly gentleman of substance, clothed as befitted a respectable dweller in any American city except New York.

"Good evening," he said, looking at her pleasantly but inquiringly. "Is Mrs. Del Garmo in?"

"Mrs. Del Garmo?" repeated Athalie, surprised. "Why, Mrs. Del Garmo is dead!"

"God bless us!" he exclaimed in a shocked voice. "Is that so? Well, I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. Well — well — well! Mrs. Del Garmo! I certainly am sorry."

He looked curiously about him, shaking his head, and an absent expression came into his white-bearded face — which changed to lively interest when his eyes fell on the table where the crystal stood mounted between the prongs of the bronze tripod.

"No doubt," he said, looking at Athalie, "you are Mrs. Del Garmo's successor in the occult profession. I notice a crystal on the table."

And in that instant the inspiration came to the girl, and she took it with the coolness and ruthlessness of last resort.

"What is it you wish?" she asked calmly, "a reading?"

He hesitated, looking at her out of aged but very honest eyes; and in a moment she was at his mercy, and the game had gone against her. She said, while the hot colour slowly stained her face: "I have never read a crystal. I had not thought of succeeding Mrs. Del Garmo until now — this moment."

"What is your name, child?" he asked in a gently curious voice.

"Athalie Greensleeve."

"You are not a trance-medium?"

"No. I am a stenographer."

"Then you are not psychical?"

"Yes, I am."

"What?"

"I am naturally clairvoyant."

He seemed surprised at first; but after he had looked at her for a moment or two he seemed less surprised.

"I believe you are," he said half to himself.

"I really am. . . . If you wish I could try. But — I don't know how to go about it," she said with flushed embarrassment.

He gazed at her it seemed rather solemnly and wistfully. "There is one thing very certain," he said; "you are honest. And few mediums are. I think Mrs. Del Garmo was. I believed in her. She was the means of giving me very great consolation."

Athalie's face flushed with the shame and pity of her knowledge of the late Mrs. Del Garmo; and the thought of the secret cupboard with its nest of wires made her blush again.

The old gentleman looked all around the room and then asked if he might seat himself.

Athalie also sat down in the stiff arm-chair by the table where her crystal stood on its tripod.

"I wonder," he ventured, "whether you could help me. Do you think so?"

"I don't know," replied the girl. "All I know about it is that I cannot help myself through crystal gazing. I never looked into a crystal but once. And what I searched for was not there."

The old gentleman considered her earnestly for a few moments. "Child," he said, "you are very honest. Perhaps you could help me. It would be a great consolation to me if you could. Would you try?"

"I don't know how," murmured Athalie.

"Maybe I can aid you to try by telling you a little about myself."

The girl lifted her flushed face from the crystal:

"Don't do that, please. If you wish me to try I will. But don't tell me anything."

"Why not?"

"Because — I am — intelligent and quick — imaginative — discerning. I might unconsciously — or otherwise — be unfair. So don't tell me anything. Let me see if there really is in me any ability."

He met her candid gaze mildly but unsmilingly; and she folded her slim hands in her lap and sat looking at him very intently.

"Is your name Symes?" she asked presently.

He nodded.

"Elisha Symes?"

"Yes."

"And — do you live in Brook — Brookfield — no! — Brookhollow?"

"Yes."

"That town is in Connecticut, is it not?"

"Yes."

His trustful gaze had altered, subtly. She noticed it.

"I suppose," she said, "you think I could have found out these things through dishonest methods."

"I was thinking so. . . . I am satisfied that you are honest, Miss Greensleeve."

"I really am — so far."

"Could you tell me how you learned my name and place of residence."

Her expression became even more serious: "I don't know, Mr. Symes. . . . I don't know *how* I knew it. . . . I think you wish me to help you find your little

grandchildren, too. But I don't know why I think so."

When he spoke, controlled emotion made his voice sound almost feeble.

He said: "Yes; find my little grandchildren and tell me what they are doing." He passed a transparent hand unsteadily across his dim eyes: "They are not living," he added. "They were lost at sea."

She said: "Nothing dies. Nothing is really lost."

"Why do you think so, child?"

"Because the whole world is gay and animated and lovely with what we call 'the dead.' And, by the dead I mean *all* things great and small that have ever lived."

He sat listening with all the concentration and rapt attention of a child intent upon a fairy tale. She said, as though speaking to herself: "You should see and hear the myriads of birds that have 'died'! The sky is full of their voices and their wings. . . . Everywhere — everywhere the lesser children live,— those long dead of inhumanity or of that crude and temporary code which we call the law of nature. All has been made up to them — whatever of cruelty and pain they suffered — whatever rigour of the 'natural' law in that chain of destruction which we call the struggle for existence. . . . For there is only one real law, and it rules all of space that we can see, and more of it than we can even imagine. . . . It is the law of absolute justice."

The old man nodded: "Do you believe that?"

She looked up at him dreamily: "Yes; I believe it. Or I should not have said it."

"Has anybody ever told you this?"

"No. . . . I never even thought about it until this moment while listening to my own words." . . . She lifted one hand and rested it against her forehead: "I cannot seem to think of your grandchildren's names. . . . Don't tell me."

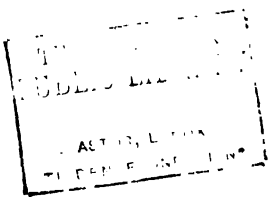
She remained so for a few moments, motionless, then with a graceful gesture and a shake of her pretty head: "No, I can't think of their names. Do you suppose I could find them in the crystal?"

"Try," he said tremulously. She bent forward, resting both elbows on the table and framing her lovely face in her hands.

Deep into the scintillating crystal her blue gaze plunged; and for a few moments she saw nothing. Then, almost imperceptibly, faint hues and rainbow tints grew in the brilliant and transparent sphere — gathered, took shape as she watched, became coherent and logical and clear and real.

She said in a low voice, still watching intently: "Blue sky, green trees, a snowy shore, and little azure wavelets. . . . Two children bare-legged, playing in the sand. . . . A little girl — so pretty! — with her brown eyes and brown curls. . . . And the boy is her brother I think. . . . Oh, certainly. . . . And what a splendid time they are having with their sand-fort! . . . There's a little dog, too. They are calling him, 'Snippy! Snippy! Snippy!' How he barks at the waves! And now he has seized the little girl's doll! They are running after him, chasing him along the sands! Oh, how funny they are! — and what a

"She said in a low voice, still watching intently: 'Blue sky, green trees, a snowy shore, and little azure wavelets . . .'"



glorious time they are having. . . . The puppy has dropped the doll. . . . The doll's name is Augusta. . . . Now the little girl has seated herself cross-legged on the sand and she is cradling the doll and singing to it — such a sweet, clear, happy little voice. . . . She is singing something about cherry pie — Oh! — now I can hear every word:

"Cherry pie,
Cherry pie,
You shall have some bye and bye.
Bye and Bye
Bye and Bye
You and I shall have a pie,
Cherry pie
Cherry pie —

"The boy is saying: 'Grandpa will have plenty for us when we get home. There's always cherry pie at Grandpa's house.'

"And the little girl answers, 'I think Grandpa will come here pretty soon and bring us all the cherry pie we want.' . . . Her name is Jessie. . . . Her brother calls her 'Jessie.' She calls him 'Jim.'

"Their other name is Colden, I think. . . . Yes, that is it — Colden. . . . They seem to be expecting their father and mother; but I don't see them — Oh, yes. I can see them now — in the distance, walking slowly along the sands —"

She hesitated, remained silent for a few moments; then: "The colours are blurring to a golden haze. I can't see clearly now; it is like looking into the

blinding disk of the rising sun. . . . All splendour and dazzling glory — and a too fierce light —"

For a moment more she remained bent over above the sphere, then raising her head: "The crystal is transparent and empty," she said.

CHAPTER XVII

IT was about five months later that Cecil Reeve wrote his long reply to a dozen letters from Clive Bailey which heretofore had remained unanswered and neglected:

"— For Heaven's sake, do you think I've nothing to do except to write you letters? I *never* write letters; and here's the exception to prove it. And if I were not at the Geyser Club, and if I had not dined incautiously, I would not write this!

"But first permit me the indiscretion of asking you why an engaged man is so charitably interested in the welfare of a young girl who is not engaged to him? And if he is interested, why doesn't he write to her himself and find out how she is? Or has she turned you down?

"But you need not incriminate and degrade yourself by answering this question.

"Seriously, Clive, you'd better get all thoughts of Athalie Greensleeve out of your head as long as you intend to get married. I knew, of course, that you'd been hard hit. Everybody was gossiping last winter. But this is rather raw, isn't it? — asking me to find out how Athalie is and what she is doing; and to write you in detail? Well anyway I'll tell you once for all

what I hear and know about her and her family — her family first, as I happen to have had dealings with them. And hereafter you can do your own philanthropic news gathering.

"Doris and Catharine were in a rotten show I backed. And when I couldn't afford to back it any longer Doris was ungrateful enough to marry a man who cultivated dates, figs, and pecan nuts out in lower California, and Catharine has just written me a most impertinent letter saying that real men grew only west of the Mississippi, and that she is about to marry one of them who knows more in half a minute than anybody could ever learn during a lifetime in New York, meaning me and Hargrave. I guess she meant me; and I guess it's so — about Hargrave. Except for myself, we certainly are a bunch of boobs in this out-of-date old town.

"Now about Athalie,— she dropped out of sight after you went abroad. Nobody seemed to know where she was or what she was doing. Nobody ever saw her at restaurants or theatres except during the first few weeks after your departure. And then she was usually with that Dane chap — you know — the explorer. I wrote to her sisters making inquiries in behalf of myself and Francis Hargrave; but they either didn't know or wouldn't tell us where she was living. Neither would Dane. I didn't suppose he knew at the time; but he did.

"Well, what do you think has happened? Athalie Greensleeve is the most talked about girl in town! She has become the fashion, Clive. You hear her discussed at dinners, at dances, everywhere.

"Some bespectacled guy from Columbia University had an article about her in one of the recent magazines. Every paper has had something to say concerning her. They all disagree except on one point,— that Athalie Greensleeve is the most beautiful woman in New York. How does that hit you, Clive?

"Well, here's the key to the box of tricks. I'll hand it to you now. Athalie has turned into a regular, genuine, out and out clairvoyant, trade-marked patented. And society with a big *S* and science with a little *s* are fighting to take her up and make a plaything of her. And the girl is making all kinds of money.

"Of course her beauty and pretty manners are doing most of it for her, but here's another point: rumour has it that she's perfectly sincere and honest in her business.

"How can she be, Clive? I ask you. Also I hand it to her press-agent. He's got every simp in town on the run. He knows his public.

"Well, the first time I met her she was dining with Dane again at the Arabesque. She seemed really glad to see me. There's a girl who remains unaffected and apparently unspoiled by her success. And she certainly has delightful manners. Dane glowered at me but Athalie made me sit down for a few minutes. Gad! I was that flattered to be seen with such a looker!

"She told me how it began — she couldn't secure a decent position, and all her money was gone, when in came an old guy who had patronised the medium whose rooms she was living in.

"That started it. The doddering old rube insisted

that Athalie take a crack at the crystal business; she took one, and landed him. And when he went out he left a hundred bones in his wake and a puddle of tears on the rug.

"She didn't tell it to me like this: she really fell for the old gentleman. But I could size him up for a come-on. The rural districts crawl with that species. Now what gets me, Clive, is this: Athalie seems to me to be one of the straightest ever. Of course she has changed a lot. She's cleverer, livelier, gayer, more engaging and bewitching than ever — and believe me she's some flirt, in a sweet, bewildering sort of way — so that you'd give your head to know how much is innocence and how much is art of a most delicious — and, sometimes, malicious kind.

"That's the girl. And that's all she is, just a girl, with all the softness and freshness and fragrance of youth still clinging to her. She's some peach-blossom, take it from uncle! And she *is* straight; or I'm a million miles away in the lockup.

"And now, granted she's morally straight, how *can* she be square in business? Do you get me? It's past me. All I can think of is that, being straight, the girl feels herself that she's also square.

"Yet, if that is so, how can she fool others so neatly?

"Listen, Clive: I was at a dance at the Faithorn's; tremendous excitement among pin-heads and débutantes! Athalie was expected, professionally. And sure enough, just before supper, in strolls a radiant, wonderful young thing making them all look like badly faded guinea-hens — and somehow I get the impression that

she is receiving her hostess instead of the contrary. Talk about self-possession and absolute simplicity! She had 'em all on the bench. Happening to catch my eye she held out her hand with one of those smiles she can be guilty of — just plain assassination, Clive! — and I stuck to her until the pin-heads crowded me out, and the rubbering women got my shoulders all over paint. And now here's where she gets 'em. There's no curtained corner, no pasteboard trophies, no gipsy shawls and bangles, no lowering of lights, no closed doors, no whispers.

"Whoever asks her anything spooky she answers in a sweet and natural voice, as though replying to an ordinary question. She makes no mystery of it. Sometimes she can't answer, and she says so without any excuse or embarrassment. Sometimes her replies are vague or involved or even apparently meaningless. She admits very frankly that she is not always able to understand what her reply means.

"However she says enough — tells, reveals, discovers, offers sound enough advice — to make her *the* plaything of the season.

"And it's a cinch that she scores more bull's eyes than blanks. I had a séance with her. Never mind what she told me. Anyway it was devilish clever,— and true as far as I knew. And I suppose the chances are good that the whole business will happen to me. Watch me.

"I think Athalie must have cleared a lot of money already. Mrs. Faithorn told me she gave her a cheque for five hundred that evening. And Athalie's private

business must be pretty good because all the afternoon until five o'clock carriages and motors are coming and going. And you ought to see who's in 'em. Your prospective father-in-law was in one! Perhaps he wanted inside information about Dominion Fuel — that damn stock which has done a few things to me since I monkeyed with it.

"But you should see the old dragons and dowagers and death-heads, and frumps who go to see Athalie! And the younger married bunch, too. I understand one has to ask for an appointment a week ahead.

"So she must be making every sort of money. And yet she lives simply enough — sky floor of a new office-apartment building on Long Acre — hoisted way up in the air above everything. You look out and see nothing but city and river and bay and haze on every side as far as the horizon's circle. At night it's just an endless waste of electric lights. There's very little sound from the street roar below. It's still up there in the sky, and sunny; silent and snowy; quiet and rainy; noiseless and dark — according to the hours, seasons, and meteorological conditions, my son. And it's some joint, believe me, with the dark old mahogany trim and furniture and the dull rich effects in azure and gold; and the Beluch carpets full of sombre purple and dusky fire, and the white cat on the window-sill watching you out of its sapphire blue eyes.

"And Athalie! curled up on her deep, soft divan, nibbling sweetmeats and listening to a dozen men — for there are usually as many as that who drop in at one time or another after business is over, and during

the evening, unless Athalie is dining out, which she often does, damn it!

"Business hours for her begin at two o'clock in the afternoon; and last until five. She could make a lot more money than she does if she opened earlier. I told her this, once, but she said that she was determined to educate herself.

"And it seems that she studies French, Italian, German, piano and vocal music; and has some down-and-out old hen read with her. I believe her ambition is to take the regular Harvard course as nearly as possible. Some nerve! What?

"Well, that's how her mornings go; and now I've given you, I think, a fair schedule of the life she leads. That fellow Dane hangs about a lot. So do Hargrave and Faithorn and young Allys and Arthur Ensart. And so do I, Clive; and a lot of others. Why, I don't know. I don't suppose we'd marry her; and yet it would not surprise me if any one of us asked her. My suspicions are that the majority of the men who go there *have* asked her. We're a fine lot, we men. So damn fastidious. And then we go to sentimental pieces when we at last get it into our bone-heads that there is no other way that leads to Athalie except by marrying her. And we ask her. And *then* we get turned down!

"Clive, *that* girl ought to be easy. To look at her you'd say she was made of wax, easily moulded, and fashioned to be loved, and to love. But, by God, I don't think it's in her to love. . . . For, if it were — good night. She'd have raised the devil in this world

long ago. And some of us would have done murder before now.

"If I had not dined so copiously and so rashly I wouldn't write you all this. I'd write a page or two and lie to you, politely. And so I'll say this: I really do believe that it is in Athalie to love some man. And I believe, if she did love him, she'd love him in any way he asked her. He hasn't come along yet; that's all. But Oh! how he will be hated when he does — unless he is the marrying kind. And anyway he'll be hated. Because, however he does it, he'll get one of the loveliest girls this town ever set eyes on. And the rest of us will realise it then, and there will be some teeth-gnashing, believe me! — and some squirming. Because the worm that never dieth will continue to chew us one and all, and never, never let us forget that the girl no man of our sort could really condescend to marry, had been asked by every one of us in turn to marry him; and had declined.

"And I'll add this for my own satisfaction: the man who gets her, and doesn't marry her, will ultimately experience a biting from that same worm which will make our lacerations resemble the agreeable tickling of a feather.

"We're a rotten lot of cowards. And what hypocrites we are!

"I saw Fontaine sending flowers to his wife. He'd been at Athalie's all the evening. There are only two occasions on which a man sends flowers to his wife; one of them is when he's in love with her.

"Aren't we the last word in scuts? Custom-ridden,

habit-cursed, afraid, eternally afraid of something — of our own sort always, and of their opinions. And that offering of flowers when the man who sends them hopes to do something of which he is ashamed, or has already done it!

"How I do run on! In *vino veritas* — there's some class to pickled truth! Here are olives for thought, red peppers for honesty, onions for logic — and cauliflower for constancy — and fifty-seven other varieties, Clive — all absent in the canned make-up of the modern man.

"'When you and I behind the veil have passed'— but they don't wear veils now; and now is our chance.

"We'll never take it. Hall-marks are our only guide. When absent we merely become vicious. We know what we want; we know what we ought to have; but we're too cowardly to go after it. And so are you. And so am I.

"Yours —

"REEVE."

CHAPTER XVIII

DURING that first year Athalie Greensleeve saw a great deal of New York society, professionally, and of many New York men, socially.

But the plaything which society attempted to make of her she gently but adroitly declined to become. She herself drew this line whenever it was necessary to draw it, never permitting herself to mistake the fundamental attitude of these agreeable and amicably demonstrative people toward her, or toward any girl who lived alone in New York and who practised such a profession.

Not among the people who employed her and who paid her lavishly for an evening's complacency; not among people who sought her at her own place during business hours for professional advice or for lighter amusement could she expect any other except professional recognition.

And after a few months of wistful loneliness she came, gradually, to desire from these people nothing except what they gave.

But there were some people she met during that first year's practice of her new profession who seemed to be unimpressed by the popular belief in such an awesome actuality as New York "society." And some of these, oddly enough, were the descendants of those who, perhaps, had formed part of the only real society the

big, raw, sprawling city ever had. But that was long, long ago, in the day of the first President.

New York will always be spotted with the symptoms but will never again have it. Paris has gone the same way. London is still flushed with it, Berlin hectic, Vienna fevered. But the days of a "society" as a distinct *ensemble*, with a logical reason for being, with authority, with functions, with offensive and defensive powers and fixed boundaries, is over forever; possibly never existed, certainly never will exist in the series of gregarious aggregations and segregations known to a perplexed and slightly amused world as the city of New York.

For Athalie that first year of new interests and of unfamiliar successes passed more rapidly than had any single month ever before passed in her life since the strenuous and ragged days of childhood.

It was a year of novelty, of excitement, of self-development, and the development of interests as new as they had been unsuspected.

Like a gaily illuminated pageant the processional passed before her with its constantly changing surroundings, new faces, new voices, new ideas, new motives.

And the new faces were to be scanned and understood, the new voices listened to intently, the new ideas analysed, the new motives detected and dissected.

In drawing-rooms, in ballrooms, in boudoirs, new scenes constantly presented themselves; one house was never like the next, one hostess never resembled another; wealth itself was presented to her under innu-

merable aspects ranging all the way from that false modesty and smugness known as meekness, to fevered pretence, arrogance, and noisy aggressiveness.

Wonderful school for a girl to learn in! — the gilded halls of which were eternally vexed and swept by the winds and whirlwinds of every human passion.

For here, under her still, clear scrutiny, was huddled humanity itself, unconsciously bent on self-revelation. And Athalie's very presence amid assemblies ever shifting, ever renewed, was educating her eyes and ears and intellect to an insight and a comprehension she had never dreamed of.

In some the supreme necessity for self-ventilation interested her; in others, secretiveness hermetically sealed fascinated her. Motives interested or disinterested, sordid or noble; desires, aspirations, hopes, perplexities,— whatever a glance, a word, an attitude, a silence, suggested to her, fixed her attention, excited her intelligence to curiosity, and focussed her interest to a mental concentration.

Out of which emerged deductions — curious fruits of logic, experience, instinct, intuitiveness, and of some extraneous perception, outside of and independent of her own conscious and objective personality.

But in one radical particular Athalie differed from any individual of either sex ever recorded in the history of hypnotic therapeutics or of psychic phenomena.

For those two worlds in which we all dwell, the supraliminal or waking world, the transliminal, or sleeping world, were merged in this young girl.

The psychological fact that natural or induced sleep is necessary for extraneous or for auto-suggestion, did not exist for her. Her psychic qualities were natural and beautiful, as much a part of her objective as of her subjective life. Neither the trance induced by mesmerism or hypnotism, nor the less harmful slumber by induction, nor the sleep of nature itself was necessary for the girl to find herself in rapport with others or with her own higher personality — her superior spiritual self. Nor did her clairvoyance require trances; nor was sleep in others necessary before she ventured suggestion.

A celebrated physician who had been eager to meet her found her extremely interesting but rather beyond his ability to classify.

How much of her he believed to be fraud might be suspected by what he said to her that evening in a corner of a very grand house on Fifth Avenue:

"There is no such thing as a 'control'; there is no such thing as a 'medium.' No so-called medium has ever revealed anything that did not exist either in her own consciousness or in the consciousness of some other living human being.

"Self-delusion induced by auto-suggestion accounts for the more respectable victims of Spiritism. For Spiritism is a doctrine accepted by many people of education, intelligence, refinement, and of generally excellent judgment.

"And it is a pity, because Spiritism is a bar to all real intellectual, material, moral, and spiritual progress. It thrives only because it pretends to satisfy

an intense human craving — the desire to re-establish personal relations with the dead. It never has done this; it never will, Miss Greensleeve. And if you really believe it has done this you are sadly and hopelessly mistaken."

"But," said Athalie, looking at him out of blue eyes the chiefest beauty of which was their fearless candour, "I do not concern myself with what is called Spiritism — with trances, table-tipping, table-rapping, slate-writing, apparitions, reincarnations — with cabinets, curtains, darkened rooms, psychic circles."

"You employ a crystal in your profession."

"Yes. I need not."

"Why do you do it, then?"

"Some clients ask for it."

"And you see things in it?"

"Yes," said the girl simply.

"And when your clients do not demand a crystal-reading?"

"I can see perfectly well without it — when I can see clearly at all."

"Into the future?"

"Sometimes."

"The past, too, of course."

"Not always."

She fascinated the non-scientific side of this famous physician; he interested her intensely.

"Do you know," she ventured with a faint smile, "that you are really quite as psychically endowed as I am?"

His handsome, sanguine features flushed deeply, but he smiled in appreciation.

"Not in the manner you so saucily imply, Miss Greensleeve," he said gaily. "My work is sound, logical, reasonable, and based on fundamental truths capable of being proven. I never saw an apparition in my life — and believed that it was really there!"

"Oh! So you *have* seen an apparition?"

"None that could have really existed independently of my own vision. In other words it wouldn't have been there at all if I hadn't supposed I had seen it."

"You *did* suppose so?"

"I knew perfectly well that I didn't see it. I didn't even think I saw it."

"But you *saw* it?"

"I imagined I did, and at the same time I knew I didn't."

"Yes," she said quietly, "you did see it, Dr. Westland. You have seen it more than once. You will see it again."

A heavier colour dyed his face; he started impatiently as though to check her — as though to speak; and did not.

She said: "If what I say is distasteful to you, please stop me." She waited a moment; then, as he evinced no desire to check or interrupt her: "I am very diffident about saying this to you — to a man so justly celebrated — pre-eminent in the greatest of all professions. I am so insignificant in comparison, so unimportant, so ignorant where you are experienced and learned.

"But may I say to you that nothing dies? I am not referring to a possible spiritual world inhabited perhaps by souls. I mean that here, on this earth, all around us, nothing that has ever lived really dies. . . . Is what I say distasteful to you?"

He offered no reply.

"Because," she said in a low voice, "if I say anything more it would concern you. And what you saw. . . . For what you saw was alive, and real — as truly living as you and I are. It is nothing to wonder at, nothing to trouble or perplex you, to see clearly — anybody — you have ever — *loved.*"

He looked up at her in a silence so strained, so longing, so intense, that she felt the terrific tension.

"Yes," she said, "you saw clearly and truly when you saw — her."

"Who? in God's name!"

"Need I tell you, Dr. Westland?"

No, she had no need to tell him. His wife was dead. But it was not his wife he had seen so often in his latter years.

No, she had no need to tell him.

Athalie had never been inclined to care for companions of her own sex. As a child she had played with boys, preferring them. Few women appealed to her as qualified for her friendship — only one or two here and there and at rare intervals seemed to her sufficiently interesting to cultivate. And to the girl's sensitive and shy advances, here and there, some woman responded.

Thus she came to know and to exchange occasional social amenities with Adele Millis, a youthful actress, with Rosalie Faithorn, a handsome girl born to a formal social environment, but sufficiently independent to explore outside of it and snap her fingers at the opinions of those peeping over the bulwarks to see what she was doing.

Also there was Peggy Brooks, a fascinating, breezy, capable young creature who was Dr. Brooks to many, and Peggy to very few. And there were one or two others, like Nina Grey and Jeanne Delauny and Anne Randolph.

But of men there would have been no limit and no end had Athalie not learned very early in the game how to check them gently but firmly; how to test, pick, discriminate, sift, winnow, and choose those to be admitted to her rooms after the hours of business had ended.

Of these the standards differed, so that she herself scarcely knew why such and such a one had been chosen — men, for instance, like Cecil Reeve and Arthur Ensart — perhaps even such a man as James Allys, 3rd. Captain Dane, of course, had been a foregone conclusion, and John Lyndhurst was logical enough; also W. Grismer, and the jaunty, obese Mr. Welter, known in sporting circles as Helter Skelter Welter, and more briefly and profanely as Hel. His running mate, Harry Ferris had been included. And there was a number of others privileged to drift into the rooms of Athalie Greensleeve when she chose to be at home to anybody.

From Clive she heard nothing: and she wrote to him no more. Of him she did hear from time to time — mere scraps of conversation caught, a word or two volunteered, some careless reference, perhaps, perhaps some scrap of intentional information or some comment deliberate if not a trifle malicious.

But to all who mentioned him in her presence she turned a serene face and unclouded eyes. On the surface she was not to be read concerning what she thought of Clive Bailey — if indeed she thought about him at all.

Meanwhile he had married Winifred Stuart in London, where, it appeared, they had taken a house for the season. All sorts of honourables and notables and nobles as well as the resident and visiting specimens of a free and sovereign people had been bidden to the wedding. And had joyously repaired thither — the bride being fabulously wealthy and duly presented at Court.

The American Ambassador was there with the entire staff of the Embassy; also a king in exile, several famished but receptive dukes and counts and various warriors out of jobs — all magnetised by the subtle radiations from the world's most powerful loadstone, money.

They said that Mrs. Bailey, Sr., was very beautiful and impressive in a gown that hypnotised the peeresses — or infuriated them — nobody seemed to know exactly which.

Cecil Reeve, lounging on the balcony by the open window one May evening, said to Hargrave — and probably really unconscious that Athalie could hear

him if she cared to: "Well, he got her all right — or rather his mother got her. When he wakes up he'll be sick enough of her millions."

Hargrave said: "She's a cold-blooded little proposition. I've known Winifred Stuart all my life, and I never knew her to have any impulse except a fishy one."

"Cold as a cod," nodded Cecil. "Merry times ahead for Clive."

And on another occasion, later in the summer, somebody said in the cool dusk of the room:

"It's true that the Bailey Juniors are living permanently in England. I saw Clive in Scotland when I was fishing out Banff way. He says they're remaining abroad indefinitely."

Some man's voice asked how Clive was looking.

"Not very fit; thin and old. I was with him several times that month and I never saw him crack a smile. That's not like him, you know."

"What is it? His wife?"

"Well, I fancy it lies somewhere between his mother and his wife — this pre-glacial freeze-up that's made a bally mummy of him."

And still again, and in the tobacco-scented dusk of Athalie's room, and once more from a man who had just returned from abroad:

"I kept running into Clive everywhere. He seems to haunt the continent, turning up like a ghost here and there; and believe me he looks the part of the lonely spook."

"Where's his Missis?"

"They've chucked the domestic. Didn't you know?"

"Divorced?"

"No. But they don't get on. What man could with that girl? So poor old Clive is dawdling around the world all alone, and his wife's entertainments are the talk of London, and his mother has become pious and is building a chapel for herself to repose in some day when the cards go against her in the jolly game."

The cards went against her in the game that autumn.

Athalie had been writing to her sister Catharine, and had risen from her desk to find a stick of sealing-wax, when, as she turned to go toward her bedroom, she saw Clive's mother coming toward her.

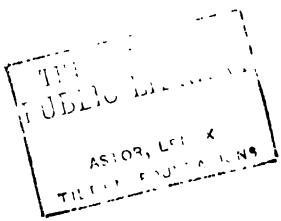
Never but once before had she seen Mrs. Bailey — that night at the Regina — and, for the first time in her life, she recoiled before such a visitor. A hot, proud colour flared in her cheeks as she drew quietly aside and stood with averted head to let her pass.

But Clive's mother gazed at her gently, wistfully, lingering as she passed the girl in the passage-way. And Athalie, turning her head slowly to look after her, saw a quiet smile on her lips as she went her silent way; and presently was no longer there. Then the girl continued on her own way in search of the sealing-wax; but she was moving uncertainly now, one arm outstretched, feeling along the familiar walls and furniture, half-blinded with her tears.

So the chapel fulfilled its functions.

It was a very ornamental private chapel. Mrs.

" Mrs. Bailey, Jr., looked pale and pretty sitting there."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Bailey, Sr., had had it pretty well peppered with family crests and quarterings, authentic and imaginary.

Mrs. Bailey, Jr., looked pale and pretty sitting there, the English sunlight filtered through stained glass; the glass also was thoroughly peppered with insignia of the House of Bailey. Rich carving, rich colouring, rich people! — what more could sticklers demand for any exclusive sanctuary where only the best people received the Body of Christ, and where God would meet nobody socially unknown.

Clive arrived from Italy after the funeral. The meeting between him and his wife was faultless. He hung about the splendid country place for a while, and spent much time inside the chapel, and also outside, where he directed the planting of some American evergreens, hemlock, spruce, and white pine.

But the aromatic perfume of familiar trees was subtly tearing him to tatters; and there came a day when he could no longer endure it.

His young wife was playing billiards with Lord Innisbrae, known intimately as Cinders, such a languid and burnt out young man was he, with his hair already white, and every lineament seared with the fires of revels long since sunken into ashes.

He watched them for a while, his hands clenched where they rested in his coat pockets, the lean muscles in his cheeks twitching at intervals.

When Innisbrae took himself off, Winifred still lounged gracefully along the billiard table taking shots with any ball that lay for her. And Clive looked on,

absent-eyed, the flat jaw muscles working at intervals.

"Well?" she asked carelessly, laying her cue across the table.

"Nothing. . . . I think I'll clear out to-morrow."

"Oh."

She did not even inquire where he was going. For that matter he did not know, except that there was one place he could not go — home; the only place he cared to go.

He had already offered her divorce — thinking of Innisbrae, or of some of the others. But she did not want it. It was, perhaps, not in her to care enough for any man to go through that amount of trouble. Besides, Their Majesties disapproved divorce. And for this reason alone nothing would have induced her to figure in proceedings certain to exclude her from one or two sets.

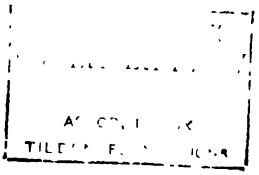
"Anything I can do for you before I leave?" he asked, dully.

It appeared that there was nothing he could do for his young wife before he wandered on in the jolly autumn sunshine.

So the next morning he cleared out. Which proceeding languidly interested Innisbrae that evening in the billiard-room.

That winter Clive got hurt while pig-sticking in Morocco, being but an indifferent spear. During convalescence he read "Under Two Flags," and approved the idea; but when he learned that the Spahi cavalry was not recruiting Americans, and when, a

"During convalescence he read 'Under Two Flags' and approved the idea."



month later, he discovered how much romance did not exist in either the First or Second Foreign Legions, he no longer desired dangers incognito under the tri-colour or under the standard bearing the open hand.

Some casual wanderer through the purlieus of science whom he met in Brindisi, induced him to go to Sumatra where orchids and ornithoptera are the game. But he acquired only a perfectly new species of fever, which took six months to get over.

He convalesced at leisure all the way from Australia to Cape Town; and would have been all right; but somebody shot at somebody else one evening, and got Clive. So it was several months more before he arrived in India, and the next year before he had enough of China.

But Clive had seen many things in those two years and had learned fairly well the lesson of his own unimportance in a world which misses no man, neither king nor clown, after the dark curtain falls and satiated humanity shuffles home to bed.

He saw a massacre — or the remains of it — where fifteen thousand yellow men and one white priest lay dead. He saw Republican China, 40,000 strong, move out after the banditti, shouldering its modern rifles, while its regimental music played "Rosie O'Grady" in quick march time. He saw the railway between Hankow and Pekin swarming with White Wolf's bloody pack, limping westward from the Honan-Anhui border with dripping fangs. He peered into the stinking wells of Honan where women were cutting their own throats. He witnessed the levity of Lhasa priests and saw their

grimy out-thrust hands clutching for tips beside their prayer-wheels.

In India he gazed upon the degradation of woman and the unspeakable bestiality of man till that vile and dusty hell had sickened him to the soul.

Back into Europe he drifted; and instantly and everywhere appeared the awful Yankee — shooting wells in Hungary, shooting craps in Monaco, digging antiques in Greece, digging tunnels in Servia,— everywhere the Yankee, drilling, bridging, constructing, exploring, pushing, arguing, quarrelling, insisting, telegraphing, gambling, touring, over-running older and better civilisations than his own crude Empire where he has nothing to learn from anybody but the Almighty — and then only when he condescends to ask for advice on Sunday.

And Clive, nevertheless, longed with a longing that made him sick, for "God's country" where all that is worst and best on earth still boils in the vast and seething cauldron of a continent in the making. There bubbles the elemental broth, dregs, scum, skimmings, residue, by-products, tailings, smoking corruption above the slowly forming and incorruptible matrix in its depths where lies imbedded, and ever growing, the Immam, the Hope of the World — gem indestructible, pearl beyond price. Difficilia quae pulchra.

And once, Clive had almost set out for home; and then, grimly, turned away toward the southern continent of the hemisphere.

In Lima he heard of an expedition fitting out to search for the lost Americans, Cromer and Page, and

for the Hungarian Seljan. And that same evening he met Captain Dane.

They looked at each other very carefully, and then shook hands. Clive said: "If you want a handy man in camp, I'd like to go."

"Come on," said Dane, briefly.

Later, looking over together some maps in Dane's rooms, the big blond soldier of fortune glanced up at the younger man, and saw a lean, bronzed visage clamped mute by a lean bronzed jaw; but he also saw two dark eyes fixed on him in the fierce silence of unuttered inquiry. After a moment Dane said very quietly:

"Yes, she was well, and I think happy, when I left New York. . . . How long is it since you have heard from her?"

"Three years."

"Three years," mused Dane, gazing into space out of his slitted eyes of arctic blue; "yes, that's some little time, Bailey. . . . She is well — I think I said that. . . . And very prosperous, and greatly admired . . . and happy — I believe."

The other waited.

Dane picked up a linen map, looked at it, fiddled with the corner. Then, carelessly: "She is not married," he said. . . . "Here's the Huallaga River as I located it four years ago. Seljan and O'Higgins were making for it, I believe. . . . That red crayon circle over there marks the habitat of the Uta fly. It's worse than the Tsetse. If anybody is hunting death — *esta aqui!* . . . Here is the Putumayo district. Hell lies

up here, just above it. . . . Here's Iquitos, and here lies Para, three thousand miles away. . . . Were you going to say something?"

But if Clive had anything to say he seemed to find no words to say it. And he only folded his arms on the table's edge and looked down at the stained and crumpled map.

"It will take us about a year," remarked Dane.

Clive nodded, but his eye involuntarily sought the irregular red circle where trouble of all sorts might be conveniently ended by a perfectly respectable Act of God.

Actus Dei nemini facit injuriam.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE was a slight fragrance of tobacco in the room mingling with the fresh, spring-like scent of lilacs — great pale clusters of them decorated mantel and table, and the desk where Athalie sat writing to Captain Dane in the semi-dusk of a May evening.

Here and there dim figures loomed in the big square room; the graceful shape of a young girl at the piano detached itself from the gloom; a man or two dawdled by the window, vaguely silhouetted against the lilac-tinted sky.

Athalie wrote on: "I had not supposed you had landed until Cecil Reeve told me this evening. If you are not too tired to come, please do so. Do you realise that you have been away over a year? Do you realise that I am now twenty-four years old, and that I am growing older every minute? You had better hasten, then, because very soon I shall be too old to believe your magic fairy tales of field and flood and all your wonder lore of travel in those distant golden lands I dream of.

"Who was your white companion? Cecil tells me that you said you had one. Bring him with you this evening; you'll need corroboration, I fear. And mostly I desire to know if you are well, and next I wish to

hear whether you did really find the lost city of Yhdunez."

A maid came to take the note to Dane's hotel, the Great Eastern, and Cecil Reeve looked up and laid aside his cigarette.

"Come on, Athalie," he said, "tell Peg to turn on one of those Peruvian dances."

Peggy Brooks at the piano struck a soft sensuous chord or two, but Francis Hargrave would not have it, and he pulled out the proper phonographic record and cranked the machine while Cecil rolled up the Beluch rugs.

The somewhat muffled air that exuded from the machine was the lovely Miraflores, gay, lively, languorous, sad by turns — and much danced at the moment in New York.

A new spring moon looked into the room from the west where like elegant and graceful phantoms the dancers moved, swayed, glided, swung back again with sinuous grace into the suavely delicate courtship of the dance.

The slender feet and swaying figure of Athalie seemed presently to bewitch the other couple, for they drew aside and stood together watching that exquisite incarnation of youth itself, gliding, bending, floating in the lilac-scented, lilac-tinted dusk under the young moon.

The machine ran down in the course of time, and Hargrave went over to re-wind it, but Peggy Brooks waved him aside and seated herself at the piano, saying she had enough of Hargrave.

She was still playing the quaint, sweet dance called "The Orchid," and Hargrave was leaning on the piano beside her watching Cecil and Athalie drifting through the dusk to the music's rhythm, when the door opened and somebody came in.

Athalie, in Cecil's arms, turned her head, looking back over her shoulder. Dane loomed tall in the twilight.

"Oh!" she exclaimed; "I am so glad!"—slipping out of Cecil's arms and wheeling on Dane, both hands outstretched.

The others came up, also, with quick, gay greetings, and after a moment or two of general and animated chatter Athalie drew Dane into a corner and made room for him beside her on the sofa. Peggy had turned on the music machine again and, snubbing Hargrave, was already beginning the Miraflores with Cecil Reeve.

Athalie said: "*Are* you well? That's the first question."

He said he was well.

"And did you find your lost city?"

He said, quietly: "We found Yhdunez."

"We?"

"I and my white companion."

"Why didn't you bring him with you this evening?" she asked. "Did you tell him I invited him?"

"Yes."

"Oh. . . . Couldn't he come?"

And, as he made no answer: "Couldn't he?" she repeated. "Who is he, anyway—"

"Clive Bailey."

She sat motionless, looking at him, the question still parting her lips. Dully in her ears the music sounded. The pallor which had stricken her face faded, grew again, then waned in the faint return of colour.

Dane, who was looking away from her rather fixedly spoke first, still not looking at her: "Yes," he said in even, agreeable tones, "Clive was my white companion. . . . I gave him your note to read. . . . He did not seem to think that he ought to come."

"Why?" Her lips scarcely formed the word.

"— As long as you were not aware of whom you were inviting. . . . There had been some misunderstanding between you and him — or so I gathered — from his attitude."

A few moments more of silence; then she was fairly prepared.

"Is he well?" she asked coolly.

"Yes. He had one of those nameless fevers, down there. He's coming out of it all right."

"Is he — his appearance — changed?"

"He's changed a lot, judging from the photographs he showed me taken three or four years ago. He's changed in other ways, too, I fancy."

"How?"

"Oh, I only surmise it. One hears about people — and their characteristics. . . . Clive is a good deal of a man. . . . I never had a better companion. . . . There were hardships — tight corners — we had a bad time of it for a while, along the Andes. . . . And the

natives are treacherous — every one of them. . . . He was a good comrade. No man can say more than that, Miss Greensleeve. That includes about everything I ever heard of — when a man proves to be a good comrade. And there is no place on earth where a man can be so thoroughly tried out as in that sunless wilderness."

"Is he stopping at the Great Eastern?"

"Yes. I believe he's going back on Saturday."

She looked up sharply: "Back? Where?"

"Oh, not to Peru. Only to England," said Dane, forcing a laugh.

After a moment she said: "And he wouldn't come. . . . It is only three blocks, isn't it?"

"It wasn't the distance, of course —"

"No; I remember. He thought I might not have cared to see him."

"That was it."

Another silence; then in a lower voice which sounded a little hard: "His wife is living in England, I suppose."

"She is living — I don't know where."

"Have they — children?"

"I believe not."

She remained silent for a while, then, coolly enough: "I suppose he is sailing on Saturday to see his wife."

"I think not," said Dane, gravely.

"You say he is sailing for England."

"Yes, but I imagine it's because he has nowhere else to go."

"Why doesn't he stay here?"

"I don't know."

"He is American. His friends live here. Why doesn't he remain here?"

Dane shook his head: "He's a restless man, Miss Greensleeve. That kind of man can't stay anywhere. He's got to go on — somewhere."

"I see."

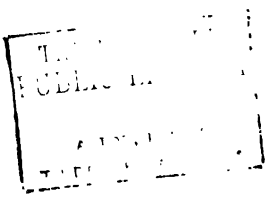
There came a pause; then they talked of other things for a while until other people began to drop in, Arthur Ensart, Anne Randolph, and young Welter — Helter Skelter Welter, always, metaphorically speaking, redolent of saddle leather and reeking of sport. His theme happened to be his own wonderful trap record, that evening; and the fat, good-humoured, ardent young man prattled on about "unknown angles," and "incomers," until Dane, who had been hunting jaguars and cannibals along the unknown Andes, concealed his yawns with difficulty.

Ensart insisted on turning on the lights and starting the machine; and presently Anne Randolph and Peggy were dancing the Miraflores with Cecil and Ensart.

Welter had cornered Hargrave and Dane and was telling them all about it, and Athalie went slowly through the passage-way and into her own bedroom, where she stood quite motionless for a while, looking at the floor. Hafiz, dozing on the bed, awoke, gazed at his mistress gravely, yawned, and went to sleep again.

Presently she dropped onto a chair by her little

"His theme happened to be his own wonderful trap record, that evening."



ivory-tinted Louis XVI desk. There was a telephone there and a directory.

When she had decided to open the latter, and had found the number she wanted, she unhooked the receiver and called for it.

After a few minutes somebody said that he was not in his room, but that he was being paged.

She waited, dully attentive to the far noises which sounded over the wire; then came a voice:

"Yes; who is it?"

She said: "I wished to speak to Mr. Bailey — Mr. Clive Bailey."

"I am Mr. Bailey."

For a moment the fact that she had not recognised his voice seemed to strike her speechless. And it was only when he spoke again, inquiringly, that she said in a low voice: "Clive!"

"Yes. . . . Is — is it *you!*"

"Yes."

And in the next heavily pulsating moment her breath came back with her self-control:

"Why didn't you come, Clive?"

"I didn't imagine you wanted me."

"I asked Captain Dane to invite you."

"Did you know whom you were inviting?"

"No. . . . But I do now. Will you come?"

"Yes. When?"

"When you like. Come now if you like — unless you were engaged —"

"No —"

"What were you doing when I called you?"

"Nothing. . . . Walking about the lobby."

"Did you find it interesting?"

She heard him laugh — such a curious, strange, shaken laugh.

She said: "I shall be very glad to see you, Clive. There are some of your friends here, too, who will be glad to see you."

"Then I'll wait until —"

"No; I had rather meet you for the first time when others are here — if you don't mind. Do you?"

"No," he said, coolly; "I'll come."

"Now?"

"Yes, immediately."

Her heart was going at a terrific pace when she hung up the receiver. She went to her mirror, turned on the side-lights, and looked at herself. From the front room came the sound of the dance music, a ripple or two of laughter. Welter's eager voice singing still of arms and the man.

Long she stood there, motionless, studying herself, so that, when the moment came that was coming now so swiftly upon her, she might know what she appeared like in his eyes.

All, so far, was sheer, fresh youth with her; her eyes had not lost their dewy beauty; the splendour of her hair remained unchanged. There were no lines, nothing lost, nothing hardened in contour. Clear and smooth her snowy chin; perfect, so far, the lovely throat: nothing of blemish was visible, no souvenirs of grief, of pain.

And, as she looked, and all the time she was looking,

she felt, subtly, that the ordered routine of her thoughts was changing; that a transformation was beginning somewhere deep within her — a new character emerging — a personality unfamiliar, disturbing, as though not entirely to be depended on.

And in the mirror she saw her lips, scarcely parted, more vivid than she had ever seen them, and her eyes two wells of azure splendour; saw the smooth young bosom rise and fall; felt her heart, rapid, imperious, beating the "colours" into her cheeks.

Suddenly, as she stood there, she heard him come in; — heard the astonished and joyous exclamations — Cecil's bantering, cynical voice, Welter's loud welcome. She pressed both hands to her hot cheeks, stared at herself a moment, then turned and walked leisurely toward the living-room.

In her heart a voice was crying, crying: "Let the world see so that there may be no mistake! This man who was friendless is my friend. Let there be no mistake that he is more or less than that." But she only said with a quick smile, and offering her hand: "I am so glad to see you, Clive. I am so glad you came." And stood, still smiling, looking into the lean, suntanned face, under the concentrated eyes of her friends around them both.

For a second it was difficult for him to speak; but only she saw the slight quiver of the mouth.

"You are — quite the same," he said; "no more beautiful, no less. Time is not the essence of your contract with Venus."

"Oh, Clive! And I am twenty-four! Tell me —

are you a trifle grey — just above the temples? — or is it the light?"

"He's grey," said Cecil; "don't flatter him, Athalie. And Oh, Lord, what a thinness!"

Peggy Brooks, professionally curious, said naïvely: "Are you still rather full of bacilli, Mr. Bailey? And would you mind if I took a drop of blood from you some day?"

"Not at all," said Clive, laughing away the strain that still fettered his speech a little. "You may have quarts if you like, Dr. Brooks."

"How was the shooting?" inquired Welter, bustling up like a judge at a bench-show when the awards are applauded.

"Oh — there was shooting — of course," said Clive with an involuntary and half-humorous glance at Captain Dane.

"Good nigger hunting," nodded Dane. "Unknown angles, Welter. You ought to run down there."

"Any incomparable Indian maidens wearing nothing but ornaments of gold?" inquired Cecil.

"That is partly true," said Clive, laughing.

"If you put a period after 'nothing,' I suppose," suggested Peggy.

"About that."

He turned to Athalie; but her silent, smiling gaze confused him so that he forgot what he had meant to say, and stood without a word amid the chatter that rose and ebbed about him.

Anne Randolph and Arthur Ensart had joined hands, their restless feet sketching the first steps of

the Miraflores; and presently somebody cranked the machine.

"Come on!" said Peggy imperiously to Dane; "you've been too long in the jungle dancing with Indian maidens!"

Other people dropped in — Adele Millis, young Grismer, John Lyndhurst, Jeanne Delauny.

When Clive saw Rosalie Faithorn saunter in with James Allys he stared, but that young seceder from his own set greeted him without embarrassment and lighted a cigarette.

"Where's Winifred?" she asked nonchalantly. "Still on the outs? Yes? Why not shuffle and draw again? Winifred was always a pig."

Clive flushed at the girl's frankness although he could have expected nothing less from her.

Rosalie continued to smoke and to inspect him critically: "You're a bit seedy and a bit weedy, Clive, but you'll come around with feeding. You're really all right. I'd have you myself if I was marrying young men these days."

"That's nice of you, Rosalie. . . . But I'm full of rare bacilli."

"The rarer the better — if you must have them. Give me the unusual, whether it's a disease or a gown. I believe I will take you, Clive — if you are not expected to live long."

"That's the trouble. Nothing seems to be able to get me."

Dane said as he passed with Peggy: "He's immune, Miss Faithorn. The prettiest woman I ever

saw, he side-stepped in Lima. And even then every man wanted to shoot him up because she made eyes at him."

"I think I'll go there," said Cecil. "Her name and quality if you please, Dane."

"Ask Clive," he called back.

Athalie, still smiling, said: "Shall I ask you, Clive?"

"Don't ask that South American adventurer anything," interrupted Cecil, "but come and dance this Miraflores with me, Athalie—"

"No, I don't wish to—"

"Come on! You must!"

"Oh, Cecil—please—"

But he had his way; and, as usual, everybody watched her while the charming music lasted,—Clive among the others, standing a little apart, lean, erect, his dark gaze fixed.

She came back to him after the dance, delicately flushed and a trifle breathless.

"Do you dance that in England?" she asked.

"It's danced—not at Court functions, I believe."

"You never did care to dance, did you?"

"No—" he shrugged, "I used to mess about some."

"And what do you do to amuse yourself in these days?"

"Nothing—much."

"You must do *something*, Clive!"

"Oh, yes. . . . I travel,—go about."

"Is that all?"

"That's about all."

She had stepped aside to let the dancers pass; he moved with her.

She said in a low, even voice: "Is it pleasant to be back, Clive?"

He nodded in silence.

"Nothing has changed very much since you went away. There's a new administration at the City Hall, a number of new sky-scrapers in town; people danced the Tango day before yesterday, the Maxixe yesterday, the Miraflores to-day, the Orchid to-morrow. That's about all, Clive."

And as he merely acquiesced in silence, she glanced up sideways at him, and remained watching this new, sun-browned, lean-visaged version of the boy she had first known and the boyish man who had gone out of her life four years before.

"Would you like to see Hafiz?" she asked.

He turned quickly toward her: "Yes," he said, the ghost of a smile lining the corners of his eyes.

"He's on my bed, asleep. Will you come?"

Slipping along the edges of the dancing floor and stepping daintily over the rolled rugs, she led the way through the passage to her rose and ivory bedroom, Clive following.

Hafiz opened his eyes and looked across at them from the pillow, stood up, his back rounding into a furry arch; yawned, stretched first one hind leg and then the other, and finally stood, flexing his fore-paws and uttering soft little mews of recognition and greeting.

"I wonder," she said, smilingly, "if you have any idea how much Hafiz has meant to me?"

He made no reply; but his face grew sombre and he laid a lean, muscular hand on the cat's head.

Neither spoke again for a little while. Finally his hand fell from the appreciative head of Hafiz, dropping inert by his side, and he stood looking at the floor. Then there was the slightest touch on his arm, and he turned to go; but she did not move; and they confronted each other, alone, and after many years.

Suddenly she stretched out both hands, looking him full in the eyes, her own brilliant with tears:

"I've got you back — haven't I?" she said unsteadily. But he could not speak, and stood savagely controlling his quivering lip with his teeth.

"I just want you as I had you, Clive — my first boy friend — who turned aside from the bright highway of life to speak to a ragged child. . . . I have had the boy; I have had the youth; I want the man, Clive,— honestly, in perfect innocence.

"Would you care what might be said of us — as long as we know our friendship is blameless? I am not taking you from *her*, am I? I am not taking anything away from her, am I?

"I have not always played squarely with men. I don't think it is possible. They have hoped for — various eventualities. I have not encouraged them; I have merely let them hope. Which is not square.

"But I wish always to play square with women. Unless a woman does, nobody will. . . . And that is why I ask you, Clive — am I robbing her — if you

come back to me — as you were? — nothing more — nothing less, Clive, but just exactly as you were."

It was impossible for him to control his voice or his words or even his thoughts just yet; he stood with his lean head turned partly from her, motionless as a rock, in the desperate grip of self-mastery, crushing the slender hands that alternately yielded and clasped his own.

"Oh, Clive," she said, "Clive! You don't know — you never can know what loneliness means to such a woman as I am. . . . I thought once — many times — that I could never again speak to you — that I never again could care to hear about you. . . . But I was wrong, pitifully wrong.

"It was not jealousy of her, Clive; you know that, don't you? There had never been any question of such sentiment between you and me — excepting once — one night — that last night when you said good-bye — and you were very much overwrought.

"So it was not jealousy. . . . It was loneliness. I wanted you, even if you had fallen in love. That sort of love had nothing to do with us!

"There was nothing in it that ought to have come between you and me? . . . Besides, if such an ephemeral thought ever drifted through my idle mind, I knew on reflection that you and I could never be destined to marry, even if such sentiment ever inclined us. I knew it and accepted it without troubling to analyse the reasons. I had no desire to invade your world — less desire now that I have penetrated it professionally and know a little about it.

"It was not jealousy, Clive."

He swung around, bent swiftly and pressed his lips to her hands. And she abandoned them to him with all her heart and soul in an overwhelming passion of purest emotion.

"I couldn't stand it, Clive," she said, "when I heard you were at your hotel alone. . . . And all the unhappiness I had heard of — your married life — I — I couldn't stand it; I couldn't let you remain there all alone!

"And when you came here to-night, and I saw in your face how these four years had altered you — how it had been with you — I wanted you back — to let you know I am sorry — to let you know I care for the man who has known unhappiness, as I cared for the boy who had known only happiness.

"Do you understand, Clive? Do you, dear? Don't you see what I see? — a man standing all alone by a closed door behind which his hopes lie dead.

"Clive, that is where you came to me, offering sympathy and friendship. That is where I come to you in my turn, offering whatever you care to take of me — if there is in me anything that may comfort you."

He bent and laid his lips to her hands again, remaining so, curbed before her; and she looked down at his lean and powerful head and shoulders, and saw the hint of grey edging the crisp, dark hair, and the dark stain of tropic suns, that never could be effaced.

So far no passion, other than innocent, had she ever known for any man,— nothing of lesser emotion, nothing physical. And, had she thought of it at all she

must have believed that it was that way with her still. For no thought concerning it disturbed her tender, tremulous happiness with this man beside her who still held her hands imprisoned against his breast.

And presently they were seated on the couch at the foot of her bed, excited, garrulous, exchanging gossip, confidences, ideas long unuttered, desires long unexpressed.

Under the sweeping flashlight of her intelligence the four years of his absence were illuminated, and passed swiftly in review for his inspection. Of loneliness, perplexity, grief, deprivation, she made light, laughingly, shrugging her smooth young shoulders.

"All that was yesterday," she said. "There is only to-day, now — until to-morrow becomes to-day. You won't go away, will you, Clive?"

"No."

"There is no need of your going, is there? — no reason for you to go — no duty — moral obligation — is there, Clive?"

"None."

"You wouldn't say so just because I wish you to, would you?"

"I wouldn't be here at all if there were any reason for me to be — there."

"Then I am not robbing her of you? — I am not depriving her of the tiniest atom of anything that you owe to her? Am I, Clive?"

"I can't see how. There is only one thing I can do for — my wife. And that is to keep away from her."

"Oh, Clive! How desperately sad! And, she is young and beautiful, isn't she? Oh, I am so sorry for you — for you both. Don't you see, dear, that I am not jealous? If you could be happy with her, and if she could understand me and let me be your friend, — that would be wonderful, Clive!"

He remained silent, thinking of Winifred and of her quality of "understanding"; and of the miserable matter of business which had made her his wife — and of his own complacent and smug indifference, and his contemptible weakness under pressure.

Always in the still and secret depths of him he had remained conscious that he had never cared for any woman except Athalie. All else had been but a vague realisation of axioms and theorems,— of premises that had rusted into his mind,— of facts which he accepted as self-evident,— such as the immutable fact that he couldn't marry Athalie, couldn't mortify his family, couldn't defy his friends, couldn't affront his circle with impunity.

To invite disaster would be to bring an avalanche upon himself which, if it wounded, isolated, even marooned him, would certainly bury Athalie out of sight forever.

His parents had so reasoned with him; his mother continued the inculcation after his father's death. And then Winifred and her mother came floating into his cosmic ken like two familiar planets.

For a while, far away in interstellar space, Athalie glimmered like a fading comet. Then orbits narrowed; adhesion and cohesion followed collision; the bi-ma-

ternal pressure never lessened. And he gave up.

Of this he was thinking now as he sat there in her rose and ivory room, gazing at the grey silk carpet underfoot; and all the while exquisitely, vitally conscious of Athalie — of her nearness to him — to tears at moments — to that happiness akin to tears.

"Clive, do you remember —" and she breathlessly recalled some gay and long forgotten incident of that never to be forgotten winter together when the theatres and restaurants knew them so well, and the day-world and night-world both credited them with being to each other everything that they had never been.

"Where will you live?" she asked.

He said: "You know I have sold our old house. . . . I don't know —" He looked at her gravely and ashamed: "I think I will take your old apartment."

She blushed to her hair: "Were you annoyed with me because I left it?"

"It hurt."

"But Clive! — I *couldn't* remain, — after you had become engaged to marry."

"Did you need to leave everything you owned?"

"They were not mine," she said in a low, embarrassed voice.

"Whose then?"

"Yours. I never considered them mine. . . . As though I were a girl of little consideration . . . who paid herself, philosophically, for what she had lost. . . . Like a man's mistress after the inevitable break has come —"

"Don't say that!"

She shrugged her pretty shoulders: "I am a woman old enough to know what the world is, and what women do in it sometimes; and what men do. . . . And I am this sort of woman, Clive: I can give, I can receive, too, but only because of the happiness it bestows on the giver. And when the sympathy which must exist between giver and receiver ends, then also possession ends, for me. . . . Why do you look at me so seriously?"

But he dared not say. And presently she went on, happily, and at random: "Of course I kept Hafiz and the first thing you ever gave me — the gun-metal wrist-watch. Here it is —" leaning across him and pulling out a drawer in her dresser. "I wear it every day when I am out. It keeps excellent time. Isn't it a darling, Clive?"

He examined it in silence, nodded, and returned it to her. And she laid it away again, saying:

"So you think of taking my old apartment? How odd! And how very sentimental of you, Clive."

He said, forcing a light tone: "Nothing has ever been disturbed there. It's all as it was when you left. Even your gowns are hanging in the closets —"

"Clive!"

"We'll go around if you like. Would you care to see it again?"

"Y — yes."

"Then we'll go together, and you can investigate closets and bureaus and dressers —"

"Clive! Why did you let those things remain?"

"I didn't care to have anybody else take that place."

"Do you know that what you have done is absurdly and frightfully sentimental?"

"Is it?" he said, trying to laugh. "Well that snivelling and false sort of sentiment is about the best that such men as I know how to comfort themselves with — when it's too late for the real thing."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I am saying. Cheap minds are fed with false sentiment; and are comforted. . . . I made out of that place a smug little monument to you — while you were living alone and almost penniless in a shabby rooming house on —"

"Oh, Clive! You didn't know that! And anyway it would not have altered things for me."

"I suppose not. . . . Well, Athalie; you are very wonderful to me — merciful, forgiving, nobly blind — God!" he muttered under his breath, "I don't understand how you can be so generous and gentle with me, — I don't, indeed."

"If you only knew how easy it is to care for you," she said with that sweet fearlessness so characteristic of her.

He bit his lips in silence.

Presently she said: "I suppose there'll be gossip in the other room. Rosalie and Cecil will be cynical and they also will try to be witty at our expense. But I don't care. Do you?"

"Shall we go in?"

"No. . . . I haven't had you for four years. If you don't care what is said about us, I don't." And she looked up at him with the most engaging candour.

"I'm only thinking about you, Athalie —"

"Don't bother to, Clive. Pretty nearly everything has been said about me, I fancy. And, unless it might damage you I'll go anywhere with you, do anything with you. *I* know that I'm all right; and I care no longer what others say or think."

"But you know," he said, "that is a theory which will not work —"

"You are wrong, Clive. Nobody cares what sort of character a popular actress may have. Her friends are not disturbed by her reputation; the public crowds to see her. And it's about that way with me, I imagine. Because I don't suppose many people believe me to be respectable. Only — there is no man alive who can say of his own knowledge that I am not, — whatever he and his brothers and sisters may imagine.

"So why should I care? — as long as the public affords me an honest living! *I* know what I am, and have been. And the knowledge, so far, does not keep me awake at night."

She laughed — the sweet, fresh, unembarrassed laugh of innocence,— not that ignorance and stupidity which is called innocence, but innocence based on a worldly wisdom which neither her intelligence nor her experience permitted her to escape.

After a short silence he bent forward and laid one hand on a crystal which stood clasped by a tiny silver tripod on the table beside her bed.

"So you did develop your — qualities — after all, Athalie."

"Yes. . . . It happened accidentally." And she told him about the old gentleman who had come to her rooms when she stood absolutely penniless and at bay before the world.

After she had ended he asked her whether she had ever again seen his father. She told him. She told him also about seeing his mother.

"Have they anything to say to me, Athalie?" he asked wistfully.

"I don't know, Clive. Some day — when you feel like it — if you will come to me —"

"Thank you, dear . . . you are wonderful — wonderfully good —"

"Oh, Clive, I'm not! I'm careless, pleasure-loving, inclined to laziness — and even to dissipation —"

"You!"

"Within certain limits," she added demurely. "I dance a lot: I know I smoke too much and drink too much champagne. I'm no angel, Clive. I won altogether too much at auction last night; ask Jim Allys. And really, if I didn't have a mind and feel a desire to cultivate it, I'd be the limit I suppose." She laughed and tossed her chin; and the pure loveliness of her child-like throat was suddenly and exquisitely revealed.

"I'm too intelligent to go wrong I suppose," she said. "I adore cultivating my mental faculties even more than I like to misbehave." She added a trifle shyly. "I speak French and Italian and German very nicely. And I sing a little and play acceptably. Please compliment me, Clive."

But her quick smile died out as she looked into his eyes — eyes haunted by the vision of all that he had denied his manhood and this girl's young womanhood — all that he had lost, irretrievably and forever on that day he married another woman.

"What is the matter, Clive?" she asked with sweet concern.

He answered: "Nothing, I guess . . . except — you are very — wonderful — to me."

CHAPTER XX

A MAY afternoon was drawing to a close; the last appointment had been made for the morrow, and the last client for the day still lingered with Athalie where she sat with her head propped thoughtfully on one slim hand, her gaze concentrated on the depths of the crystal sphere.

After a long silence she said: "You need not be anxious. Her wireless apparatus is out of order. They are repairing it. . . . It was a bad storm."

"Is there any ice near her?"

After a pause: "I can see none."

"Any ships?"

"One of her own line, hull down. They have been exchanging signals. . . . There seems to be no necessity for her to stand by. The worst is over . . . Yes, the *Empress of Borneo* proceeds. The *Empress of Formosa* will be reported this evening. You need not be anxious: she'll dock on Monday."

"Are you sure?" said the man as Athalie lifted her eyes from the crystal and smiled reassuringly at him. He was a stocky, red-faced, trim, middle-aged man; but his sanguine visage bore the haggard imprint of sleepless nights, and the edges of his teeth had bitten his under lip raw.

Athalie glanced carelessly at the crystal, then nodded.

"Yes," she said patiently. "I am sure of it, Mr. Clements. The *Empress of Formosa* will dock on Monday — about — nine in the morning. She will be reported by wireless from the *Empress of Borneo* this evening. . . . They have been relaying it from the Delaware Capes. . . . There will be an extra edition of the evening papers. You may dismiss all anxiety."

The man rose, stood a moment, his features working with emotion.

"I'm not a praying man," he said. "But if this is so — I'll pray for you. . . . It can't hurt you anyway —" he checked himself, stammering, and the deep colour stained him from his brow to his thick, powerful neck as he stood fumbling with his portfolio.

But Athalie smilingly put aside the recompense he offered: "It is too much, Mr. Clements."

"It is worth it to the Company — if the news is true —"

"Then wait until your steamer docks."

"But you say you are certain —"

"Yes, I am: but *you* are not. My refusal of payment will encourage you to confidence in me. You have been ill with anxiety, Mr. Clements. I know what that means. And now your bruised mind cannot realise that the trouble is ended — that there is no reason now for the deadly fear that has racked you. But everything will help you now — what I have told you — and my refusal of payment until your own eyes corroborate everything I have said."

"I believe you now," he said, staring at her. "I wish to offer you in behalf of the Company —"

A swift gesture conjured him to silence. She rose, listening intently. Presently his ears too caught the faint sound, and he turned and walked swiftly and silently to the open window.

"There is your extra," she said pleasantly. "The *Empress of Borneo* has been reported."

She was still lying on the couch beside the crystal, idly watching what scenes were drifting, mist-like, through its depths — scenes vague, and faded in colour, and of indefinite outline; for, like the monotone of a half-heard conversation which does not concern a listener these passing phantoms concerned not her.

Under her indifferent eyes they moved; pale-tinted scenes grew, waxed, and waned, and a ghostly processional flowed through them without end under her dark blue dreaming eyes.

She had turned and dropped her head back upon the silken pillows when his signal sounded in telegraphic sequence on the tiny concealed bell.

The still air of the room was yet tremulous with the silvery vibration when he entered, looked around, caught sight of her, and came swiftly toward her.

She looked up at him in her sweet, idly humorous way, unstirring.

"This is becoming a habit with you, Clive."

"Didn't you care to see me this afternoon?" he asked so seriously that the girl laughed outright and stretched out one hand to him.

"Clive, you're becoming ponderous! Do you know

it? Suppose I didn't care to see you this particular afternoon. Is there any reason why you should take it so seriously?"

"Plenty of reasons," he said, saluting her smooth, cool hand,—"with all these people at your heels every minute —"

"Please don't pretend —"

"I'm *not* jealous. But all these men — Cecil and Jimmy Allys — they're beginning to be a trifle annoying to me."

She laughed in unfeigned and malicious delight:

"They don't annoy *me!* No girl ever was annoyed by overattention from her suitors — except Penelope — and *I* don't believe she had such a horrid time of it either, until her husband came home and shot up the whole *thé dansant.*"

He was still standing beside her couch without offering to seat himself; and she let him remain standing a few minutes longer before she condescended to move aside on her pillows and nod a tardy invitation.

"Has it been an interesting day, Clive?"

"Rather."

"And you have really gone back into business again?"

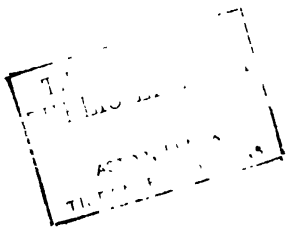
"Yes."

"And will the real estate market rally at the news of your august reappearance?" she inquired mischievously.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he said with gravity.

"Wonderful, Clive! And I think I'd better get in

"' There is your extra,' she said pleasantly."



on the ground floor before values go sky-rocketing. Do you want a commission from me?"

"Of course."

"Very well. Buy me the old Hotel Greensleeve."

He smiled; but she said with pretty seriousness: "I really have been thinking about it. Do you suppose it could be bought reasonably? It's really a pretty place. And there's a hundred acres — or there was. . . . I would like to have a modest house somewhere in the country."

"Are you in earnest, Athalie?"

"Really I am. . . . Couldn't that old house be fixed over inexpensively? You know it's nearly two hundred years old, and the lines are good if the gingerbread verandas and modern bay windows are done away with."

He nodded; and she went on with shy enthusiasm: "I don't really know anything about gardens, except I know that I should adore them. . . . I thought of a garden — just a simple one. . . . And some cows and chickens. And one nice old horse. . . . It is really very pretty there in spring and summer. And the bay is so blue, and the salt meadows are so sweet. . . . And the cemetery is near. . . . I should not wish to alter mother's room very much. . . . I'd turn the bar into a sun parlour. . . . But I'd keep the stove . . . where you and I sat that evening and ate peach turnovers. . . . About how much do you suppose the place could be bought for?"

"I haven't the least idea, Athalie. But I'll see what can be done to-morrow. . . . It ought to be a good

purchase. You can scarcely go wrong on Long Island property if you buy it right."

"Will you see about it, Clive?"

"Of course I will, you dear girl!" he said, dropping his hand over hers where it lay between them.

She smiled up at him. Then, distrait, turned her blue eyes toward the window, and remained gazing out at the late afternoon sky where a few white clouds were sailing.

"'Clouds and ships on sky, and sea,'" she murmured to herself. . . . "'And God always at the helm.' Why do men worry? All sail into the same port at last."

He bent over her: "What are you murmuring all to yourself down there?" he asked, smilingly.

"Nothing much,— I'm just watching the driftsam and flotsam borne on the currents flowing through my mind — flowing through it and out again — away, somewhere — back to the source of thought, perhaps."

He was still bending above her, and she looked up dreamily into his eyes.

"Do you think I shall ever have my garden?" she asked.

"All things good must come to you, Athalie."

She laughed, looking up into his eyes: "You meant that, didn't you? 'All things good'— yes — and other things, too. . . . They come to all I suppose. . . . Tell me, do you think my profession disreputable?"

"You have made it otherwise, haven't you?"

"I don't know. I'm eternally tempted. My intel-

ligence bothers me. And where to draw the line between what I really see and what I divine by deduction — or by intuition — I scarcely know sometimes. . . . I try to be honest. . . . When you came in just now, were they calling an extra?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear what they were calling?"

"Something about the *Empress of Borneo* being reported safe."

She nodded. Then: "That is the hopeless part of it. I can sometimes help others; never myself. . . . I suppose you have no idea how many, many hours I have spent looking for you. . . . I never could find you. I have never found you in my crystal, or in my clearer vision, or in my dreams; . . . never heard your voice, never had news of you except by common report in everyday life. . . . Why is it, I wonder?"

His expression was inscrutable. She said, her eyes still lingering on his: "You know it makes me indignant to see so much that neither concerns nor interests me — so much that passes — in this! —" laying one hand on the crystal beside the couch . . . "and never, never in the dull monotony of the drifting multitude to catch a glimpse of you. . . . I wonder, were I lost somewhere in the world, if you could find me, Clive?"

"I'd die, trying," he said unsmilingly.

"Oh! How romantic! I wasn't fishing for a pretty speech, dear. I meant, could you find me in the crystal. Look into it, Clive."

He turned and went over to the clear, transparent sphere, and she, resting her chin on both arms, lay gazing into it, too.

After a silence he shook his head: "I see nothing, Athalie."

"Can you not see that great yellow river, Clive? And the snow peaks on the horizon? . . . Palms, tall reeds, endless forests — everything so still — except birds flying — and a broad river rolling between forests. . . . And a mud-bar, swarming with crocodiles. . . . And a dead tree stranded there, on which large birds are sitting. . . . There is a big cat-shaped animal on the bank; but the forest is dark and sunless,— too dusky to see into. . . . I think the animal is a jaguar. . . . He's drinking now. . . . Yes, he's a jaguar — a heavy, squarely built, spotted creature with a broad, blunt head . . . He's been eating a pheasant; there are feathers everywhere — bright feathers, brilliant as jewels. . . . Hark! You didn't hear that, did you, Clive? Somebody has shot the jaguar. They've shot him again. He's whirling 'round and 'round — and now he's down, biting at sticks and leaves. . . . There goes another shot. The jaguar lies very still. His jaws are partly open. He has big, yellow cat-teeth. . . . I can't seem to see who shot him. . . . There are some black men coming. One has a small American flag furled around the shaft of his spear. He's waving it over the dead jaguar. They're all dancing now. . . . But I can't see the man who shot him."

"I shot him," said Clive.

"I thought so." She turned and dropped back among her pillows.

"You see," she said, listlessly, "I can never seem to find you, Clive. Sometimes I suspect your presence. But I am never certain. . . . Why is it that a girl can't find the man she cares for most in the whole world?"

"Do you care for me as much as that?"

"Why, yes," she said, a trifle surprised.

"And do you think I return your — regard — in measure?"

She looked at him curiously, then, with her engaging and fearless smile: "*Quantum suff*," she said. "You know you oughtn't to care *too* much for me, Clive."

"How much is too much?"

"You know," she said, watching his face, the smile still lingering on her lips.

"No, I don't. Tell me."

"I'll inform you when it's necessary."

"It's necessary now."

"No, it isn't."

"I'm afraid it is."

There was a silence. She lay watching him for a moment longer while the smile in her eyes slowly died out. Then, all in a moment, a swift change altered her expression; and she sat up on the couch, supporting herself on both hands.

"What is happening to you, Clive!" she said almost breathlessly.

"Nothing new."

"What do you mean?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Of course."

"Then,"— but he could not say it. He had no business to, and he knew it. It was the one thing he could refrain from saying, for her sake; the one service he could now render her.

He sat staring into space, the iron grimness of self-control locking every fetter that he wore — must always wear now.

She waited, her eyes intent on his face, her colour high, heart rapid.

"What had you to say to me?" she asked, breaking the silence.

He forced a laugh: "Nothing — except that sometimes being with you again makes me — very contented —"

"Is that what you had to say?"

"Yes. I told you it was nothing new."

She lowered her gaze and remained silent for a moment, apparently considering what he had said. Then the uplifted candour of her eyes questioned him again:

"You don't imagine yourself in love with me again, do you, Clive?"

"No."

"Nothing like that could happen to you again, could it? . . . Because it has not yet happened to me. It couldn't. . . . And it would be too — too ghastly if you — if anything —"

"Don't talk about it that way!" he said sharply. "If it *did* happen — what of it?" . . . He forced a

smile. "But it won't happen. . . . Things like that don't happen to people like you and me. We care too much for each other, don't we, Athalie?"

"Yes. . . . It would be terrible. . . . I don't know why I put such ideas into your head — or into my own. But you — there was something in your expression. . . . Oh, Clive, dear, it *couldn't* happen to you, could it?"

She leaned forward impulsively and put both hands on his shoulders, gazing into his eyes, searching them fearfully for any trace of what she thought for a moment she had seen in them.

He said gaily enough: "No fear, dear. I'm exactly what I always have been. I'll always be what you want me to be, Athalie."

"I know. . . . But if ever —"

"No, no! Nothing can ever happen to worry you —"

"But if —"

"Nothing shall happen!"

"I know. But if ever it does —"

"It won't."

"Oh, Clive, listen! If it *does* happen to you, what will you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. . . . If it does happen, what will you do, Clive?"

"But —"

"Answer me!"

"I —"

"Please answer me. What will you do about it?"

"Nothing," he said, flushing.

"Why not?"

"Why not? What is there — what would there be to do? What could I have to say to you if —"

"You could say that you loved me — if you did."

"To what purpose?" he demanded, red and astonished.

"To whatever purpose you followed. . . . Why shouldn't you tell me? If it ever happened that you fell in love with me again I had rather you told me than that you kept silent. I had rather know it than have it happen and never know it. Is there anything wrong in a man if he happens to fall in love with a girl?"

"He can remain silent, anyway."

"Why? Because he cannot marry her?"

"Yes."

"If you ever fell in love with me — would you wish to marry me?"

"If I ever did," he said, "I'd go through hell to marry you."

She considered him, curiously, as though trying to realise something inconceivable.

"I do not think of you that way," she said. "I do not think of you sentimentally at all. . . . Only that I care for you — deeply. I don't believe it's in me to love. I mean — as the world defines love. . . . So don't fall in love with me, Clive. . . . But, if you ever do, tell me."

"Why?" he asked unsteadily.

"Because you ought to tell me. I should not wish to die and never know it."

"Would you care?"

"Care? Do you ask a girl whether she could remain unmoved, uninterested, indifferent, if the man she cares for most falls in love with her?"

"Could you — respond?"

"Respond? With love? I don't know. How can I tell? I believe that I have never been in love in all my life. I don't know what it feels like. You might as well ask somebody born blind to read an ordinary book. . . . But one thing is certain: if that ever happens to you, you ought to tell me. Will you?"

"What good would it do?"

"What harm would it do?" she asked frankly.

"Suppose, knowing we could not marry, I made love to you, Athalie?"

Suddenly the smile flashed in her eyes: "Do you think I'm a baby, Clive? Suppose, knowing what we know, you did make love to me? Is that very dreadful?"

"My responsibility would be."

"The responsibility is mine. I'm my own mistress. If I chose to be yours the responsibility is mine —"

"Don't say such things, Athalie!"

"Why not? Such things happen — or they don't happen. I have no idea they're likely to happen to us. . . . I'm not a bit alarmed, Clive. . . . Perhaps it's the courage of ignorance —" She glanced at him again with the same curious, questioning look in her eyes,—"Perhaps because I cannot comprehend any such temptation. . . . And never could. . . . Nevertheless if you fall in love with me, tell me. I would

not wish you to remain dumb. You have a right to speak. Love isn't a question of conditions or of convenience. You ought to have your chance."

"Chance!"

"Certainly."

"What chance?"

"To win me."

"Win you! — when I can't marry you —"

"I didn't say marry; I said, win. . . . If you ever fell in love with me you would wish to win my love, wouldn't you? And if you did, and I gave it to you, you would have won me for yourself, wouldn't you? Then why should you worry concerning *how* I might love you? That would be my affair, my personal responsibility. And I admit to you that I know no more than a kitten what I might do about it."

She looked at him a moment, her hands still resting on his shoulders, and suddenly threw back her head, laughing deliciously: "Did you ever before take part in such a ridiculous conversation?" she demanded. "Oh, but I have always adored theoretical conversations. Only give me an interesting subject and take one end of it and I'll gratefully grasp the other, Clive. What an odd man you are; and I suppose I'm odd, too. And we may yet live to inhabit an odd little house together. . . . Wouldn't the world tear me to tatters! . . . I wonder if I'd dare — even knowing I was all right!" . . . The laughter died in her eyes; a swift tenderness melted them: "I do care for you so truly, Clive! I can't bear to think of ever again living without you. . . . You know it isn't silliness or love or

anything except what I've always felt for you — loyalty and devotion, endless, eternal. And that is all there is or ever will be in my heart and mind."

So clear and sweet and confident in his understanding were her eyes that the quick emotion that leaped responsive left only a ruddy trace on his face and a slight quiver on his lips.

He said: "Nothing shall ever threaten your trust in me. No man can ask for more than you give, Athalie."

"I give you all I am. What more is there?"

"I ask no more."

"Is there more to wish for? Are you really satisfied, Clive?"

"Perfectly;"— but he looked away from her.

"And you don't imagine that you love me, do you?"

"No,"— still looking away from her.

"Meet my eyes, and say it."

"I —"

"Clive!"

"There is no —"

"Clive, obey me!"

So he turned and looked her in the eyes. And after a moment's silence she laughed, uncertainly, almost nervously.

"You — you *do* imagine it!" she said. "Don't you?"

He made no reply.

Presently she began to laugh again, a gay, tormenting, excited little laugh. Something in his face seemed

to exhilarate her, sending the blood like wine to her cheeks.

"You *do* imagine it! Oh, Clive! *You!* You think yourself in love with your old comrade! . . . I *knew* it! There was something about you — I can't explain exactly what — but there was *something* that told me."

She was laughing, now, almost wickedly and with all the naïve and innocently malicious delight of a child delighting in its fellow's torment.

"Oh, Clive!" she said, "what are you going to do about it? And why do you gaze at me so oddly? — as though I were angry or disconcerted. I'm not. I'm happy. I'm crazy about this new relation of ours. It makes you more interesting than I ever dreamed even you could be —"

"You know," he said almost grimly, "if you are going to take it like this —"

"Take what?"

"The knowledge that —"

"That you are in love with me? Then you *are!* Oh, Clive, Clive! You dear, sweet, funny boy! And you've told me so, haven't you? Or it amounts to that; doesn't it?"

"Yes; I love you."

She leaned swiftly toward him, sparkling, flushed, radiant, tender:

"You dear boy! I'm not really laughing at you. I'm laughing — I don't know why: happiness — excitement — pride — I don't know. . . . Do you suppose it actually is love? It won't make you unhappy, will it? Besides you can be very busy trying to win me.

That will be exciting enough for both of us, won't it?"

"Yes — if I try."

"But you will try, won't you?" she demanded mockingly.

He said, forcing a smile: "You seem to think it impossible that I could win you."

"Oh," she said airily, "I don't say that. You see I don't know the method of procedure. I don't know what you're going to do about your falling in love with me."

He leaned over and took her by the waist; and she drew back instinctively, surprised and disconcerted.

"That is silly," she said. "Are you going to be silly with me, Clive?"

"No," he said, "I won't be that."

He sat looking at her in silence for a few moments. And slowly the belief entered his heart like a slim steel blade that she had never loved, and that there was in her nothing except what she had said there was, loyalty and devotion, unsullied and spiritual, clean of all else lower and less noble, guiltless of passion, ignorant of desire.

As he looked at her he remembered the past — remembered that once he might have taught her love in all its attributes — that once he might have married her. For in a school so gentle and secure as wedlock such a girl might learn to love.

He had had his chance. What did he want of her now, then? — more than he had of her already. Love? Her devotion amounted to that — all of it that could

concern a man already married — hopelessly married to a woman who would never submit to divorce. What did he want of her then?

He turned and walked to the open window and stood looking out over the city. Sunset blazed crimson at the western end of every cross-street. Far away on the Jersey shore electric lights began to sparkle.

He did not know she was behind him until one arm fell lightly on his shoulder.

It remained there after her imprisoned waist yielded a little to his arm.

"You are not unhappy, are you, Clive?"

"No."

"I didn't mean to take it lightly. I don't comprehend; that's all. It seems to me that I can't care for you more than I do already. Do you understand?"

"Yes, dear."

She raised one cool hand and drew his cheek gently against her own, and rested so a moment, looking out across the misty city.

He remembered that night of his departure when she had put both arms around his neck and kissed him. It had been like the serene touch of a crucifix to his lips. It was like that now,— the smooth, passionless touch of her cool, young face against his, and her slim hand framing his cheek.

"To think," she murmured to herself, "that you should ever care for me in that way, too. . . . It is wonderful, wonderful — and very sweet — if it does not make you unhappy. Does it?"

"No."

"It's so dear of you to love me that way, Clive. Could — could *I* do anything — about it?"

"How?"

"Would you care to kiss me?" she asked with a faint smile. And turned her face.

Chaste, cool and fresh as a flower her young mouth met his, lingered; then, still smiling, and a trifle flushed and shy, she laid her cheek against his shoulder, and her hands in his, calm in her security.

"You see," she said, "you need not worry over me. I am glad you are in love with me."

CHAPTER XXI

IT was in the days when nothing physical tainted her passionate attachment to Clive. When she was with him she enjoyed the moment with all her heart and soul — gave to it and to him everything that was best in her — all the richness of her mental and bodily vigour, all the unspoiled enthusiasm of her years, all the sturdy freshness of youth, eager, receptive, credulous, unsatiated.

With them, once more, the old happy companionship began; the Café Arabesque, the Regina, the theatres, the suburban restaurants knew them again. Familiar faces among the waiters welcomed them to the same tables; the same ushers guided them through familiar aisles; the same taxi drivers touched their caps with the same alacrity; the same porters bestirred themselves for tips.

Sometimes when they were not alone, they and their friends danced late at Castle House or the Sans-Souci, or the Humming-Bird, or some such resort, at that time in vogue.

Sometimes on Saturday afternoons or on Sundays and holidays they spent hours in the museums and libraries — not that Clive had either inherited or been educated to any truer appreciation of things worth

while than the average New York man — but like the majority he admitted the solemnity and fearsomeness of art and letters, and his attitude toward them was as carefully respectful as it was in church.

Which first perplexed and then amused Athalie who, with no opportunities, had been born with a wholesome passion for all things beautiful of the mind.

The little she knew she had learned from books or from her companionship with Captain Dane that first summer after Clive had gone abroad. And there was nothing orthodox, nothing pedantic, nothing simulated or artificial in her likes or dislikes, her preferences or her indifference.

Yet, somehow, even without knowing, the girl instinctively gravitated toward all things good.

In modern art — with the exception of a few painters — she found little to attract her; but the magnificence of the great Venetians, the sombre splendour of the great Spaniards, the nobility of the great English and Dutch masters held her with a spell forever new. And, as for the exquisite, naïvely self-conscious works of Greuze, Lancret, Fragonard, Boucher, Watteau, and Nattier, she adored them with all the fresh and natural appetite of a capacity for visual pleasure unjaded.

He recognised Raphael with respect and pleasure when authority reassured him it *was* Raphael. Also he probably knew more about the history of art than did she. Otherwise it was Athalie who led, instinctively, toward what gallery and library held as their best.

Her favourite lingering places were amid the immortal Chinese porcelains and the masterpieces of the Renaissance. And thither she frequently beguiled Clive,— not that he required any persuading to follow this young and lovely creature who ranged the full boundaries of her environment, living to the full life as it had been allotted her.

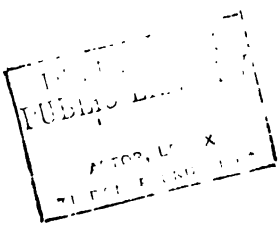
Wholesome with that charming and rounded slenderness of perfect health there yet seemed no limit to her capacity for the enjoyment of all things for which an appetite exists — pleasures, mental or physical — it did not seem to matter.

She adored walking; to exercise her body delighted her. Always she ate and drank with a relish that fascinated; she was mad about the theatre and about music: — and whatever she chanced to be doing she did with all the vigour, intelligence, and pleasure of which she was capable, throwing into it her entire heart and soul.

It led to temporary misunderstandings — particularly with the men she met — even in the small circle of friends whom she received and with whom she went about. Arthur Ensart entirely mistook her until fiercely set right one evening when alone with him; James Allys also listened to a curt but righteously impassioned discourse which he never forgot. Hargrave's gentlemanly and suavely villainous intentions, when finally comprehended, became radically modified under her coolly scornful rebuke. Welter, fat and sentimental, never was more than tiresomely saccharine; Been ris and Lyndhurst betrayed symptoms of being forth

tive
best

"Once more, the old happy companionship began."



understood, but it was a toss-up as to the degree of seriousness in their intentions.

The intentions of men are seldom more serious than they have to be. But they all were helplessly, hopelessly caught in the magic, gossamer web of Athalie's beauty and personal charm; and some merely kicked and buzzed and some tried to rend the frail rainbow fabric, and some struggled silently against they knew not what — themselves probably. And some, like Dane, hung motionless, enmeshed, knowing that to struggle was futile. And some, like Clive, were still lying under her jewelled feet in the very centre of the sorcery, so far silent and unstirring, awaiting to see whether the grace of God would fall upon them or the *coup-de-grâce* that ended all. Eventually, however, like all other men, Clive gave signs of life and impatience.

"*Can't* you love me, Athalie?" he said abruptly one night, when they had returned from the theatre and he had already taken his leave — and had come back from the door to take it again more tenderly. The girl let him kiss her.

She, in her clinging, sparkling evening gown was standing by her crystal, the fingers of one hand lightly poised upon it, looking down at it.

"Love you, Clive," she repeated in smiling surprise. "Why, I do, you dear, foolish boy. I've admitted it to you. Also haven't you just kissed me?"

"I know. . . . But I mean — couldn't you love me above all other men — above everything in this world —"

"But I *do!* Were you annoyed because I was silly with Cecil to-night?"

"No. . . . I understand. You simply can't help turning everybody's head. It's in you,—it's part of you —"

"I'm merely having a good time," she protested. "It means no more than you see, when I flirt with other men. . . . It never goes any farther — except — once or twice I have let men kiss me. . . . Only two or three. . . . Before you came back, of course —"

"I didn't know that," he said sullenly.

"Didn't you? Then the men were more decent than I supposed. . . . Yes, I let John Lyndhurst kiss me once. And Francis Hargrave did it. . . . And Jim Allys tried to, against my wishes — but he never attempted it after that."

She had been looking down again at the crystal while speaking; her attitude was penitential, but the faint smile on her lips adorably mischievous. Presently she glanced up at him to see how he was taking it. He must have been taking it very badly, for:

"Clive!" she said, startled; "are you really annoyed with me?"

The gathering scowl faded and he forced a smile. Then the frown returned; he flung one arm around her supple waist and gathered both her hands into his, holding them closely imprisoned.

"You *must* love!" he said almost roughly.

"My dear! I've told you that I do love you."

"And I tell you you don't! Your calm and cheerful friendship for me isn't love!"

"Oh. What else is it, please?"

He kissed her on the mouth. She suffered his lips again without flinching, then drew back laughingly to avoid him.

"Why are you becoming so very demonstrative?" she asked. "If you are not careful it will become a horrid habit with you."

"Does it mean nothing more than a habit to you?" he asked, unsmilingly.

"It means that I care enough for you to let you do it more than once, doesn't it?"

He shrugged and turned his face toward the window:

"And you believe that you love me," he said, sullenly and partly to himself.

"You amazingly sulky man, *what* are you muttering to yourself?" she demanded, bending forward and across his shoulder to see his face which was still turned from her. He swung about and caught her fiercely in his arms; and the embrace left her breathless and flushed.

"Clive — please —"

"*Can't* you care for me! For God's sake show it if you can!"

"Please, dear — I —"

"*Can't* you!" he repeated unsteadily, drawing her closer. "You know what I am asking. Answer me!"

She bent her head and rested it against his shoulder a moment, considering; she then looked away from him, troubled:

"I don't want to be your — mistress," she said.

Truth disconcerts the vast majority. It disconcerted him — after a ringing silence through which the beating of rain on the window came to him like the steady tattoo of his own heart.

"I did not ask that," he said, very red.

"You meant that. . . . Because I've been everything to you except that."

"I want you for my wife," he interrupted sharply.

"But you are married, Clive. So what more can I be to you, unless I become — what I don't want to become —"

"I merely want you to love me — until I can find some way out of this hell on earth I'm living in!"

"Dear, I'm sorry! I'm sorry you are so unhappy. But you can't get free,— can you? She won't let you, will she?"

"I've got to have my freedom! I can't stand this. Good God! Must a man do life for being a fool once? Isn't there any allowance to be made for a first offence? I've always wanted to marry you. I was a miserable, crazy coward to do what I did! Haven't I paid for it? Do you know what I've been through?"

She said very sweetly and pitifully: "Dear, I know what people suffer — what lonely hearts endure. I think I understand what you have been through."

"I know you understand! Fool that I am who enlightened you. But yours was the injury of bruised faith — the suffering caused by outrage. No hell of self-contempt set *you* crawling about the world in agony; no despicable self-knowledge drove *you* out into the waste places. Yours was the sorrow of a self-

respecting victim; mine the grief of the damned fool who has done to death all that he ever loved for the love of expediency and of self!"

"Clive!—"

"That's what I am!" he interrupted fiercely, "a damned fool! I don't know what else I am, but I can't live without you, and I won't!"

She said: "You told me that being in love with me would not make you unhappy. So I told you to love me. I was wrong to let you do it."

"You darling! I am more than happy!"

"It was a dreadful mistake, Clive! I shouldn't have let you."

"Do you think you could have stopped me?"

"I don't know. Couldn't I? I've stopped other men. . . . I shouldn't have let you. But it was so delightful — to be really loved by *you!* All my pride responded. It seemed to dignify everything; it seemed to make me really a woman, with a place among other women — to be loved by such a man as you . . . and I was *not* selfish about it; I *did* ask you whether it would make you unhappy to be in love with me. Oh, I see now that I was very wrong, Clive — very foolish, very wrong! Because it *is* making you restless and unhappy —"

"If you could only love me a little in return!"

"I don't know how to love you except the way I am doing —"

"There is a more vital emotion —"

"It seems impossible that I could care for you more deeply than I do."

"If you could only respond with a little tenderness —"

"I *do* respond — as well as I know how," she said piteously.

He drew her nearer and touched her cheek with his lips:

"I know, dear. I don't mean to complain."

"Oh, Clive! I have let you fall in love with me and it is making you miserable! And now it's making me miserable, too, because you are disappointed in me."

"No —"

"You are! I'm not what you expected — not what you wanted —"

"You are everything I want! — if I could only wake your heart!" he said in a low tense voice.

"It isn't my heart that is asleep. . . . I know what you miss in me. . . . And I can't help it. I — I don't wish to help it — or to be different."

She dropped her head against his shoulder. After a few moments she spoke from there in a muffled, childish voice:

"What can I do about it? I don't want to be your mistress, Clive. . . . I never wanted to do — anything — like that."

A deeper colour burnt his face. He said: "Could you love me enough to marry me if I managed to free myself?"

"I have never thought of marrying you, Clive. It isn't that I couldn't love you — that way. I suppose I could. Probably I could. Only — I don't know anything about it —"

"Let me try to free myself, anyway."

"How is it possible?"

He said, exasperated: "Do you suppose I can endure this sort of existence forever?"

The swift tears sprang to her eyes. "I don't know — I don't know," she faltered. "I thought this existence of ours ideal. I thought you were going to be happy; I supposed that our being together again would bring happiness to us both. It doesn't! It is making us wretched. You are not contented with our friendship!" She turned on him passionately: "I don't wish to be your mistress. I don't want you to make me wish to be. No girl naturally desires less than she is entitled to, or more than the law permits — unless some man teaches her to wish for it. Don't make such a girl of me, Clive! You — you are beginning to do it. And I don't wish it! Truly I don't!"

In that fierce flash of candour,— of guiltless passion, she had revealed herself. Never, until that moment, had he supposed himself so absolutely dominant, invested with such power for good or evil. That he could sway her one way or the other through her pure loyalty, devotion, and sympathy he had not understood.

To do him justice he desired no such responsibility. He had meant to be honest and generous and unselfish even when the outlook seemed most hopeless,— when he was convinced that he had no chance of freedom.

But a man with the girl he loves in his arms might as well set a net to catch the wind as to set boundaries

to his desires. Perhaps he could not so ardently have desired his freedom to marry her had he not as ardently desired her love.

Love he had of her, but it was an affection utterly innocent of passion. He knew it; she realised it; realised too that the capacity for passion was in her. And had asked him not awaken her to it, instinctively recoiling from it. Generous, unsullied, proudly ignorant, she desired to remain so. Yet knew her peril; and candidly revealed it to him in the most honest appeal ever made to him.

For if the girl herself suspected and dreaded whither her loyalty and deep devotion to him might lead her, he had realised very suddenly what his leadership meant in such a companionship.

Now it sobered him, awed him,— and chilled him a trifle.

Himself, his own love for her, his own passion he could control and in a measure subdue. But, once awakened, could he control such an ally as she might be to his own lesser, impatient and hot-headed self?

Where her disposition was to deny, he could still fetter self and acquiesce. But he began to understand that half his strength lay in her unwillingness; half of their safety in her inexperience, her undisturbed tranquillity, her aloofness from physical emotion and her ignorance of the mastery of the lesser passions.

The girl had builded wholesomely and wisely for herself. Instinct had led her truly and well as far as that tangled moment in her life. Instinct still would lead her safely if she were let alone,— instinct and the

intelligence she herself had developed. For the ethical view of the question remained only as a vague memory of precepts mechanical and meaningless to a healthy child. She had lost her mother too early to have understood the casual morals so gently inculcated. And nobody else had told her anything.

Also intelligence is often a foe to instinct. She might, with little persuasion accept an unconventional view of life; with a little emotional awakening she might more easily still be persuaded to a logic builded on false foundations. Add to these her ardent devotion to this man, and her deep and tender concern lest he be unhappy, and Athalie's chances for remaining her own mistress were slim enough.

Something of this Clive seemed to understand; and the understanding left him very serious and silent where he stood in the soft glow of the lamp with this young girl in his arms and her warm, sweet head on his breast.

He said after a long silence: "You are right, Athalie. It is better, safer, not to respond to me. I'm just in love with you and I want to marry you — that's all. I shall not be unhappy about it. I am not, now. If I marry you, you'll fall in love, too, in your own way. That will be as it should be. I could desire no more than that. I *do* desire nothing more."

He looked down at her, smiled, releasing her gently. But she clung to him for a moment.

"You are so wonderful, Clive — so dear! I *do* love you. I will marry you if I can. I want to make up everything to you — the lonely years, your deep un-

happiness — even," she added shyly, "your little disappointment in me —"

"You don't understand, Athalie. I am not disappointed —"

"I *do* understand. And I am thinking of what will happen if you fail to free yourself. . . . Because I realize now that I don't propose to leave you to grow old all alone. . . . I shall live with you when you're old whatever people may think. I tell you, Clive, I'm the same child, the same girl that you once knew, only grown into a woman. I know right from wrong. I had rather not do wrong. But if I've got to — I won't whimper. And I'll do it thoroughly!"

"You won't do it at all," he said, smiling at her threat to the little tin gods.

"I don't know. If they won't give you your freedom, and if —"

"Nonsense, Athalie," he said, laughing, coolly master of himself once more. "We mustn't be unwholesomely romantic, you and I. I'll marry you if I can; if I can't, God help us, that's all."

But she had become very grave: "God help us," she repeated slowly. "Because I believe that, rightly or wrongly, I shall one day belong to you."

He said: "It can be only in one way. The right way." Perhaps he had awakened too late to a realisation of his power over her, for the girl made no response, no longer even looked at him.

"Only one way," he repeated, uneasily; —"the right way, Athalie."

But into her dark blue eyes had come a vague and

brooding beauty which he had never before seen. In it was tenderness, and a new wisdom, alas! and a faint and shadowy something, profound, starlike, inscrutable.

"As for love," he said, forcing a lighter tone, "there are fifty-seven different varieties, Athalie; and only one is poisonous,— unless taken with the other fifty-six, and in small doses."

She smiled faintly and walked to the window. Rain beat there in the darkness spattering the little iron balcony. Below, the bleared lights of the city stretched away to the sky-line.

He followed, and slipped his arm through hers; and she bent her wrist, interlacing her slim fingers with his.

"You know," he said, "that when I often speak with apparent authority I am wrong. In the final analysis *you* are the real leader, Athalie. Your instincts are the right ones; your convictions honest, your conclusions just. Mine are too often confused with selfishness and indecision. For mine is an irresolute character; — or it was. I'm trying to make it firmer."

She pressed his hand lightly, her eyes still fixed on the light-smeared darkness.

He went on more gravely: "Candour and the intuition born of common sense,— that is where you are so admirable, dear. Add to that the tenderest heart that ever beat, and a proud ignorance of the lesser, baser emotions — and, who am I to interfere,— to come into the sweet order of your life with demands that confuse you — with complaints against the very

destiny I brought upon us both — with the clamour of a selfish and ignoble philosophy which your every instinct rejects, and which your heart entertains only because it *is* your heart, and its heavenly sympathy has never failed me yet. . . . Oh, Athalie, Athalie, it would be a shameful day for me and a bitter day for you if my selfishness and irresolution ever swerved you. What I have lost — if I have indeed lost it — is lost irrevocably. And I've got to learn to face it."

She said, still gazing absently into the darkness: "Yes. But I am just beginning to wonder what it is that *I* may have lost,— what it is that I have never known."

"Don't think of it! Don't permit anything I have said or done to trouble you or stir you toward such an awakening. . . . I don't want to stand charged with that. You are tranquil, now —".

"I — *was*."

"You are still!" he said in quick concern. "Listen, Athalie — the majority of men lose their grip at moments; men as irresolute as I lose it oftener. Don't waste sympathy on me; it was nothing but a whine born of a lesser impulse — born of emotions less decent than you could comprehend —"

"Maybe I am beginning to comprehend."

"You shall not! You shall remain as you are! Dear, don't you realise that I can't steady myself unless I can look up to you? You've raised yourself to where you stand; you've made your own pedestal. Look down at me from it; don't ever *step* down; don't ever condescend; don't ever let me think you mortal.

You are not, now. Don't ever descend entirely to my level — even if we marry."

She turned, smiling too wisely, yet adorably: "What endless romance there is in that boy's heart of yours! There always was,— when you came running back to me where I stood alone by the closed door,— when you found me living as all women who work live, and made a beautiful home for me and gave me more than I wished to take, asking nothing of me in return. Oh, Clive, you were chivalrous and romantic, too, when you listened to your mother's wishes and gave me up. I understand it so much better, now. I know how it was — with your father dead and your beautiful mother, broken, desolate, confiding to your keeping all her hope and pride and future happiness,— all the traditions of the family, and its dignity and honour!

"In the light of a clearer knowledge, do you suppose I blame you now? Do you suppose I blame you for anything? — for your long and broken-hearted and bitter silence? — for the quick resurgence of your affection for me — for your love — Oh, Clive! — for your passion?

"Do you suppose I think less of you because you love me — care for me in the many and inexplicable ways that a man cares for a woman? — because you want me as a man wants the woman he loves, as his wife if it may be so, as his *own*, anyhow?"

She let her eyes rest on him in a new and fearless comprehension, tender, curious, sad by turns.

"It is the romance of passion in you that has been fighting to awaken the Sleeping Princess of a legend,"

she said with a slight smile; "it is the same illogical, impulsive romance that draws back just as her closed lids tremble, fearing to awaken her to the sorrows and temptations of a world which, after all, God made for us to wake in."

"Athalie! I am a scoundrel if I have —"

"Oh, Clive!" she laughed, mocking the solemn measure of her own words; "adorable boy of impulse and romance, never to outgrow its magic armour, destined always to be ruled by dreams through the sweetest and most generous of hearts, you need not fear for me. I am already awake — at least I am sufficiently aroused to understand you — and something, too, of my own self which I have never hitherto understood."

For a second, lightly, she rested her warm, fresh cheek against his. When it was burning she disengaged her fingers from his and leaned aside against the rain-swept window.

"You see?" she said calmly but with heightened colour. . . . "I am very human after all. . . . But it is still my mind that rules, not my emotions."

She turned to him in her old sweetly humorous and mocking manner:

"That is all the romance of which I am capable, Clive — if there be any real romance in a very clear mind. For it is my intellect that must lead me to salvation or to destruction. If I am to come crashing down at your feet, I shall have already planned the fall. If I am to be destroyed, it will not be by any accident of romantic emotion, of unconsidered impulse, or sudden blindness of passion; it will be because

my intelligence coolly courted destruction, and accepted every chance, every hazard."

So spoke Athalie, smiling, in the full confidence and pride of her superb youth, certain of the mind's autocracy over matter, lightly defying within herself the latent tempest, of which she as yet divined no more than the first exquisitely disturbing breeze; — deriding, too, the as yet unloosened bolts of the old gods themselves,— the white lightning of desire.

"Come," she said, half mockingly, half seriously, passing her arm through Clive's; —"we are quite safe together in this safe and sane old world — unless *I* choose — otherwise."

She turned and touched her lips lightly to his hair:

"So you may safely behave as irrationally, irresponsibly, and romantically as you choose. . . . As long as I now am wide awake."

And then, for the first time, he realised his utter responsibility to this girl who so gaily and audaciously relieved him of it. And he understood how pitifully unarmed she really stood, and how imminent the necessity for him to forge for himself the armour of character, and to wear it eternally for his own safety as well as hers.

"Good night, dear," he said.

In her new and magnificent self-confidence she turned and put both arms around his neck, drawing his lips against hers.

But after he had gone she leaned against the closed door, less confident, her heart beating too fast and hard to entirely justify this new enfranchisement of the

body, or her overwhelming faith in its wise and trusted guardian, the mind.

And he went soberly on his way through the rain to his hotel, troubled but determined upon his new rôle as his own soul's armourer. All that was in him of romance and of chivalry was responding passionately to the girl's unconscious revelation of her new need.

For now he realised that her boasted armour was of gauze; he could see her naked heart beating behind it; he beheld, through the shield she lifted on high to protect them both, the moon shining with its false, reflected light.

Never did Athalie stand in such dire need of the armour she supposed that she was wearing.

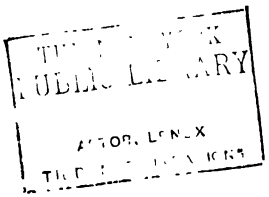
And he must put on his own, rapidly, and rivet it fast — the inflexible mail of character which alone can shield such souls as his — and hers.

When he came into his own room, a thick letter from his wife lay on the table. Before he broke the seal he laid aside his wet garments, being in no haste to read any more of the now incessant reproaches and complaints with which Winifred had recently deluged him.

Finally, when he was ready, he cut the envelope and seated himself beside the lamp. She wrote from the house in Kent:

"It was a very different matter when you were travelling about and I could say that you were off on another exploring expedition. But your return from South America was mentioned in the London papers;

"Finally . . . he cut the envelope and seated himself beside the lamp."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and the fact that you are now not only in New York but that you have also gone into business there is known and is the subject of comment.

"I shall be, as usual, perfectly frank with you; I do not care whether you are here or not; in fact I infinitely prefer your absence to your presence. But your engaging in business in New York is a very different matter, and creates a different situation for me.

"You like to travel. Why don't you do it? I don't care to be the subject of gossip; and I shall be — am, no doubt, already,— because you are making the situation too plain and too public.

"It's well enough for one's friends to surmise the condition of affairs; no unpleasantness for me results. But let it once become newspaper gossip and my situation among people I most earnestly desire to cultivate would become instantly precarious and perhaps impossible.

"It is not necessary for me to inform you what is the very insecure status of an American woman here, particularly in view of the Court's well known state of mind concerning marital irregularities.

"The King's views coincide with the Queen's. And the Queen's are perfectly well known.

"If you continue your exploring expeditions, which you evidently like to engage in, and if you report here at intervals for the sake of appearances, I can get on very well and very comfortably. But if you settle in New York and engage in business there, and continue to remain away from this country where you are popularly supposed to maintain residences in town and

country, I shall certainly begin to experience very disagreeably the consequences of your selfish conduct.

"Your reply to my last letter has thoroughly incensed me.

"You always have been selfish. From the time I had the misfortune to marry you I had to suffer from your selfish, self-centred, demonstrative, and rather common character — until you finally learned that demonstration is offensive to decent breeding, and that, although I happened to be married to you, I intended to keep to my own notions of delicacy, reserve, privacy, and self-respect.

"Of course you thought it a sufficient reason for us to have children merely because *you* once thought you wanted them; and I shall not forget what was your brutal attitude toward me when I told you very plainly that I refused to be saddled with the nasty, grubby little brats. Evidently you are incapable of understanding any woman who is not half animal.

"I did not desire children, and that ought to have been sufficient for you. I am not demonstrative toward anybody; I leave that custom to my servants. And is it any crime if the things that interest and appeal to you do not happen to attract me?

"And I'll tell you now that your subjects of conversation always bored me. I make no pretences; I frankly do not care for what you so smugly designate as 'the things of the mind' and 'things worth while.' I am no hypocrite: I like well bred, well dressed people; I like what they do and say and think. Their characters may be negative as you say, but their poise

and freedom from demonstration are most agreeable to me.

"You politely designated them as fools, and what they said you characterised as piffle. You had the exceedingly bad taste to sneer at various members of an ancient and established aristocracy — people who by inheritance from generations of social authority, require no toleration from such a man as you.

"These are the people who are my friends; among whom I enjoy an established position. This position you now threaten by coolly going into business in New York. In other and uglier words you advertise to the world that you have abandoned your home and wife.

"Of course I cannot help it if you insist on doing this common and disgraceful thing.

"And I suppose, considering the reigning family's attitude toward divorce, that you believe me to be at your mercy.

"Permit me to inform you that I am not. If, in a certain set, wherein I now have the entrée, divorce is not tolerated,— at any rate where the divorced wife of an American would not be received,— nevertheless there are other sets as desirable, perhaps even more desirable, and which enjoy a prestige as weighty.

"And I'll tell you now that in case you persist in affronting me by remaining in business in New York, I shall be forced to procure a separation — possibly a divorce. And I shall not suffer for it socially as no doubt you think I will.

"There is only one reason why I have not done so already — disinclination to be disturbed in a social

milieu which suits me. It's merely the inconvenience of a transfer to another equally agreeable set.

"But if your selfish conduct forces me to make the change, don't doubt for one minute, my friend, that I'm entirely capable and able to accomplish it without any detriment or anything worse than some slight inconvenience to myself.

"Whether it be a separation or a divorce I have not yet made up my mind.

"There is only one reason why I should hesitate and that is the thought that possibly you might be glad of your freedom. If I were sure of that I'd punish you by asking for a separation. But I do not suppose it really matters to you. I think I know you well enough to know that you have no desire to marry again. And, as for the young woman in whose company you made yourself notorious before we were engaged — well, I think you would hesitate to offer her marriage, or even, perhaps, the not unprecedented privilege of being your *chère amie*. I do you the honour of believing you too fastidious to select a public fortune teller for your mistress, or to parade a cheap trance-medium as a specimen of your personal taste in pulchritude.

"Meanwhile your attitude in domestic matters continues to annoy me. Be good enough to let me know, definitely, what you propose to do, so that I may take proper measures to protect myself — because I have always been obliged to protect myself from you and your vulgar notions ever since my mother and yours made a fool of me.

"WINIFRED STUART BAILEY."

With his care-worn eyes still fixed on the written pages he rested his elbow on the table and dropped his head on his hand, heavily.

Rain swept the windows; the wind also was rising; his room seemed to be full of sounds; even the clock which had a subdued tick and a most discreet manner of announcing the passing of time, seemed noisy to him.

"God! what a mess I've made of life," he said aloud. For a moment a swift anger burned fiercely against the woman who had written him; then the flame of it blew against himself, scorching him with the wrath of self-contempt.

"Hell!" he said between his teeth. "It isn't the fault of that little girl across the ocean. It's my fault, mine, and the fault of nobody else."

Indecision, the weakness of a heart easily appealed to, the irresolution of a man who was not man enough to guard and maintain his own freedom of action and the right to live his own life — these had encompassed the wrecking of him.

It seemed that he was at least man enough to admit it, generous enough to concede it, even if perhaps it was not altogether true.

But never once had he permitted himself, even for a second, to censure the part played by his mother in the catastrophe. That he had been persuaded, swerved, over-ridden, dominated, was his own fault.

The boy had been appealed to, subtly, cleverly, on his most vulnerable side; he had been bothered and badgered and beset. Two women, clever and hard as

nails, had made up their minds to the marriage; the third remained passive, indifferent, but acquiescent. Wiser, firmer, and more experienced men than Clive had surrendered earlier. Only the memory of Athalie held him at all; — some vague, indefinite hope may have remained that somehow, somewhere, sometime, either the world's attitude might change or he might develop the courage to ignore it and to seek his happiness where it lay and let the world howl.

That is probably all that held him at all. And after a while the constant pressure snapped that thread. This was the result.

He lifted his head and stared, heavy-eyed, at his wife's letter. Then, dropping the sheets to the floor he turned and laid both arms upon the table and buried his face in them.

Toward morning his servant discovered him there, asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

THE following day Clive replied to his wife by cable: "As it seems to make no unpleasant difference to you I have concluded to remain in New York. Please take whatever steps you may find most convenient and agreeable for yourself."

And, following this he wrote her:

"I am inexpressibly sorry to cause you any new annoyance and to arouse once more your just impatience and resentment. But I see no use in a recapitulation of my shortcomings and of your own many disappointments in the man you married.

"Please remember that I have always assumed all blame for our marriage; and that I shall always charge myself with it. I have no reply to make to your reproaches,— no defence; I was not in love with you when I married you — which is as serious an offence as any man can perpetrate toward any woman. And I do not now blame you for a very natural refusal to tolerate anything approaching the sympathy and intimacy that ought to exist between husband and wife.

"I did entertain a hazy idea that affection and perhaps love might be ultimately possible even under the circumstances of such a marriage as ours; and in a youthful, ignorant, and inexperienced way I at-

tempted to bring it about. My notions of our mutual obligations were very vague and indefinite.

"Please believe I did not realise how utterly distasteful any such ideas were to you, and how deep was your personal disinclination for the man you married.

"I understand now how many mistakes I made before I finally rid you of myself, and gave you a chance to live your life in your own way unharassed by the interference of a young, ignorant, and probably aggressive man.

"Your aversion to motherhood was, after all, your own affair. Man has no right to demand that of woman. I took a very bullying and intolerant attitude toward you — not, as I now realise, from any real conviction on the subject, but because I liked and wanted children, and also because I was influenced by the cant of the hour — the fashion being to demand of woman, on ethical grounds, quantitative reproduction as a marriage offering to the Almighty. As though indiscriminate and wholesale addition to humanity were an admirable and religious duty. Nothing, even in the Old Testament, is more stupid than such a doctrine; no child should ever be born unwelcome to both parents.

"I am sorry I could not find your circle of friends interesting. I sometimes think I might have, had you and I been mutually sympathetic. But the situation was impossible; our ideas, interests, convictions, tastes, were radically at variance; we had absolutely nothing in common to build on. What marriage ties could endure the strain of such conditions? The fault was mine, Winifred; I am sorry for you.

"I don't know much about anything, but, thinking as clearly and as impersonally as it is in me to think, I begin to believe that divorce, far from deserving the stigma attached to it, is a step forward in civilisation.

"Perhaps it may be only a temporary substitute for something better — say for more wholesome and more honest social conditions where the proposition for mating and the selection of a mate may lie as freely with your sex as with mine.

"Until then I know of nothing more honest and more sensible than to undo the wrong that ignorance and inexperience has accomplished. No woman's moral or spiritual salvation is dependent upon her wearing the fetters of a marriage abhorred. Such a stupid sacrifice is unthinkable to modesty and decency, and is repulsive to common sense. And any god who is supposed to demand that of humanity is not the true God, but is as grotesque and false as any African idol or any deity ever worshipped by Puritan or Pagan or by any orthodox assassin of free minds since the first murder was perpetrated on account of creed.

"You are entitled to divorce. I don't know whether I am or not, having done this thing. Nobody likes to endure unhappy consequences. I don't. But it was my own doing and I have no ground for complaint.

"You, however, have. You ought to be free of me. Of course, I'd be very glad to have my freedom; I shall not lie about it; but the difference is that you deserve yours and I don't. But I'll be very grateful if you care to give it to me.

"Don't write any more bitterly than you can help.

I don't believe it really affords you any satisfaction; and it depresses me more than you could realise. I know only too well what I have been and wherein I have failed so miserably. Let me forget it whenever I can, Winifred. And if, for me, there remains any chance, any outlook, be generous enough to let me try to take it.

"Your husband,

"C. BAILEY."

The consequences of this letter did not seem to be very fortunate. There came a letter from her so bitter and menacing that a cleverer man might have read in it enough of menace between the lines to forearm him with caution at least.

But Clive merely read it once and destroyed it and tried to forget it.

It was not until some time afterward that, gradually, some instinct in him awoke suspicion. But for a long while he was not perfectly sure that he was being followed.

However, when he could no longer doubt it, and when the lurking figures and faces of at least two of the men who dogged him everywhere had become sufficiently familiar to him, he wrote a short note to his wife asking for an explanation.

But he got none — principally because his wife had already sailed.

The effect of Winifred's letters on an impressionable, sensitive, and self-distrustful character, was never very quickly effaced.

Whatever was morbid in the man became apparent after he had received such letters, and took the form of a quiet withdrawal from the circles which he affected, until such time as mortification and shame had subsided.

He had written briefly to Athalie saying that business would take him out of town for a few weeks. Which it did as a matter of fact, landing him at Spring Pond, Long Island, where he completed the purchase of the Greensleeve tavern and took title in his own name.

Old Ledlie had died; his only heir appeared to be glad enough to sell; the title was free and clear; the possibilities of the place fascinating.

Clive prowled around the place in two minds whether he might venture to call in a local builder and have him strip the protuberances from the house, which was all that was necessary to restore it to its original form; or whether he ought to leave that for Athalie to manage.

But there remained considerable to be done; May was in full bud and blossom already; and if Athalie was to enjoy the place at all that summer it ought to be made livable.

So Clive summoned several people to his aid with the following quick results: A New York general contractor took over the entire job guaranteeing quick results or forfeiture. A local nurseryman and an emergency gang started in. They hedged the entire front with privet for immediate effect, cleared, relocated, and restored the ancient flower garden on its quaint original lines; planted its borders thickly with old time

perennials, peonies, larkspurs, hollyhocks, clove pinks, irises, and lilies; replanted the rose beds with old-fashioned roses, set the wall beds with fruit trees and gay annuals, sodded, trimmed, raked, levelled, cleaned up, and pruned, until the garden was a charming and logical thing.

Fortunately the newness was not apparent because the old stucco walls remained laden with wistaria and honeysuckle, and the alley of ancient box trees required clipping only.

In the centre of the lawn he built a circular pool and piped the water from Spring Brook. It fell in a slender jet, icy cold, powdering pool, basin and grass with spray.

Where half-dead locust and cedar trees had to be felled Clive set tall arbor vitæ and soft maples. He was an expensive young man where Athalie's pleasure was concerned; and as he worked there in the lovely May weather his interest and enthusiasm grew with every fresh fragrant spadeful of brown earth turned.

The local building genius repainted the aged house after bay window and gingerbread had been stripped from its otherwise dignified façade; replaced broken slates on the roof, mended the great fat chimneys, matched the traces of pale bluish-green that remained on the window shutters, filled in the sashes with small, square panes, instituted modern plumbing, drainage, sewage, and electric lights — all of which was emergency work and not too difficult as the city improvements had now been extended as far as the village a mile to the eastward. But it was expensive.

At first Clive had decided to leave the interior to Athalie, but he finally made up his mind to restore the place on its original lines with the exception of her mother's room. This room he recognised from her frequent description of it; and he locked it, pocketed the key, and turned loose his men.

All that they did was to plaster where it was needed, re-kalsomine all walls and ceilings, scrape, clean, mend, and re-enamel the ancient woodwork. Trim, casings, wainscot, and stairs were restored to their original design and finish; dark hardwood floors replaced the painted boards which had rotted; wherever a scrap of early wall-paper remained he matched it as closely as possible, having an expert from New York to do the business; and the fixtures he chose were simple and graceful and reflected the period as nearly as electric light fixtures can simulate an era of candle-sticks and tallow dips.

He was tremendously tempted to go ahead, so fascinating had the work become to him, but he realised that it was not fair to Athalie. All that he could reasonably do he had done; the place was clean and fresh, and restored to its original condition outside and in, except for the modern necessities of lighting, heating, plumbing, and running water in pantry, laundry, kitchen, and bathrooms. Two of the latter had replaced two clothes-presses; the ancient cellar had been cemented and whitewashed, and heavily stocked with furnace and kitchen coal and kindling.

Also there were fire-dogs for the three fine old-fashioned fireplaces in the house which had been disin-

terred from under bricked-in and plastered surfaces where only the aged mantel shelves and a hole for a stove pipe revealed their probable presence.

The carpets were too ragged and soiled to retain; the furniture too awful. But he replaced the latter, leaving its disposition and the pleasure of choosing new furniture and new floor coverings to Athalie.

Hers also was to be the pleasure of re-stocking the house with linen; of selecting upholstery and curtains and the requisities for pantry, kitchen, and dining-room.

Once she told him what she had meant to do with the bar. And he took the liberty of doing it, turning the place into a charming sun-parlour, where, in a stone basin, gold-fish swam and a forest of feathery and flowering semi-tropical plants spread a fret-work of blue shadows over the cool stone floor.

But he left the big stove as it had been; and the rather quaint old chairs with their rush-bottoms renovated and their lustrous wood stained and polished by years of use.

Every other day he went to Spring Pond from his office in New York to watch the progress of the work. The contractor was under penalty; Clive had not balked at the expense; and the work was put through with a rush.

In the meanwhile he called on Athalie occasionally, pretending always whenever she spoke of it, that negotiations were still under way concerning the property in question, and that such transactions required patience and time.

One matter, too, was gradually effaced from his mind. The tall man and the short man who had been following him so persistently had utterly disappeared. And nobody else seemed to have taken their places. Eventually he forgot it altogether.

Two months was the period agreed upon for the completion of Athalie's house and garden, and the first week in July found the work done.

It had promised to be a hot week in the city: Athalie, who had been nowhere except for an evening at some suburban restaurant, had begun to feel fagged and listless and in need of a vacation.

And that morning she had decided to go away for a month to some quiet place in the mountains, and she was already consulting various folders and advertisements which she had accumulated since early spring, when the telephone in her bedroom rang.

She had never heard Clive's voice so gay over the wire. She told him so; and she could hear his quick and rather excited laugh.

"Are you very busy to-day?" he asked.

"No; I'm going to close up shop for a month, Clive. I'm hot and tired and dying for a glimpse of something green. I was just looking over a lot of advertisements — cottages and hotels. Come up and help me."

"I want you to spend the day with me in the country. Will you?"

"I'd love to. Where?"

"At Spring Pond."

"Clive! Do you really want to go there?"

"Yes. As your guest."

"What?"

"If you will invite me. Will you?"

"What do you mean? Have you bought the place for me?"

"I have the deed in my pocket, all ready to be transferred to you."

"You darling! Clive, I am so excited —"

"So am I. Shall I come for you in my brand new car? I've invested in an inexpensive Stinger runabout. May I drive you down? It won't take much longer than by train. And it will cool us off."

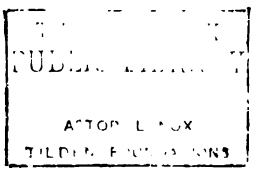
"Come as soon as you can get here!" she cried, delighted. "This is going to be the happiest day of my entire life!"

And so it came about that Athalie in her pretty new gown and hat of lilac lingerie, followed by a maid bearing three suit-cases, hat-box, toilet satchel, and automobile coat, emerged from the main entrance of the building where Clive sat waiting in a smart Stinger runabout. When he saw her he sprang out and came forward, hat in hand.

"You darling," she said in a low, happy voice. "You've made me happier than I ever dreamed of being. I don't know what to say to you; I simply don't know how to thank you for doing this wonderful thing for me."

He, too, was happier than he had ever been in all his life; and so much in love that he found nothing to say for a moment save the few trite phrases in which a man

"When he saw her he sprang out and came forward."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in love says many commonplaces, all of which only mean, "I love you."

Doubtless she understood the complicated code, for she laughed and blushed a trifle and looked around at her maid laden with luggage.

"Where can we put these, Clive?" she asked.

"What on earth is all that luggage?" he asked, surprised.

"I'm going to remain a few days," she explained, "so I've brought a few things."

"But do you imagine there is anything to eat or anywhere to lay your head in that tumble down old house?" he demanded, secretly enchanted with her rash enthusiasm.

"I propose to camp. I can buy milk, crackers, and sardines at Spring Pond village; also sufficient bathroom and bed linen. That is all I require to be perfectly comfortable."

There was no rumble on the Stinger, only a baggage rack and boot. Here he secured, covered, and strapped Athalie's impedimenta; the maid slipped on her travelling coat; she sprang lightly into the seat; and Clive went around and climbed in beside her, taking the wheel.

The journey downtown and across the Queensboro Bridge was the usual uncomfortable and exasperating progress familiar to all who pilot cars to Long Island. Brooklyn was negotiated prayerfully; they swung into the great turnpike, through the ugliest suburbs this humiliated world ever endured, on through the shabby, filthy, sordid environment of the gigantic Bur-

rough, past ignoble villages, desolate wastes, networks of railway tracks where grade crossings menaced them, and on along the purlieus of suburban deserts until the flat green Long Island country spread away on either side dotted with woods and greenhouses and quaint farm-houses and old-time spires.

"It is pretty when you get here," he said, "but it's like climbing over a mile of garbage to get out of one's front door. No European city would endure being isolated by such a desert of squalor and abominable desolation."

But Athalie merely smiled. She had been far too excited to notice the familiar ugliness and filth of the dirty city's soiled and ragged outskirts.

And now the car sped on amid the flat, endless acres of cultivated land, and already her dainty nose was sniffing familiar but half-forgotten odours — the faintest hint of ocean, the sun-warmed scent of freshly cut salt hay; perfumes from woodlands in heavy foliage, and the more homely smell from barn-yard and compost-heap; from the sunny, dusty village streets through which they rolled; from village lanes heavy with honeysuckle.

"I seem to be speeding back toward my childhood," she said. "Every breath of this air, every breeze, every odour is making it more real to me. . . . I wonder whatever became of my ragged red hood and cloak. I can't remember."

"I'd like to have them," he said. "I'd fold them and lay them away for —"

He checked himself, sobered, suddenly and painfully

aware that the magic of the moment had opened for him an unreal vista where, in the false dawn, the phantom of Hope stood smiling. Her happy smile had altered, too; and her gloved hand stole out and rested on his own for a moment in silence. Neither said anything for a while, and yet the sky was so blue, the wind so soft and aromatic, and the sun's splendour was turning the very earth to powdered gold. And maybe the gods would yet be kind. Maybe, one day, others, with Athalie's hair and eyes, might smooth the faded scarlet hood and cloak with softly inquiring fingers.

He spoke almost harshly from his brief dream: "There is the Bay!"

But she had turned to look back at the quiet little cemetery already behind them, and a moment or two passed before she lifted her eyes and looked out across the familiar stretch of water. Azure and silver it glimmered there in the sun. Red-shouldered blackbirds hovered, fluttered, dropped back into the tall reeds; meadow larks whistled sweetly, persistently; a slow mouse-hawk sailed low over the fields, his broad wings tipped up like a Japanese kite, the silver full-moon flashing on his back as he swerved. And then the old tavern came into sight behind its new hedge of privet.

Athalie caught sight of it,—of the tall hedge, the new posts of stone through which a private road now curved into the grounds and around a circle before the porch; saw the new stone wall inclosing it ablaze with nasturtiums, the brilliant loveliness of the old and long neglected garden beyond; saw the ancient

house in all its quaint and charming simplicity bereft of bow-window, spindle, and gingerbread fretwork,—saw the white front of it, the green shutters, the big, thick chimneys, the sunlight sparkling on small square panes, and on the glass of the sun parlour.

The girl was trembling when he stopped the car at the front door, sprang out, and aided her to descend.

A man in overalls came up, diffidently, and touched his broad straw hat. To him Clive gave a low-voiced order or two, then stepped forward to where the girl was standing.

"It is too beautiful—" she began, but her voice failed, and he saw the sensitive lips tremulous in their silence and the eyes brilliant with the menace of tears.

He drew her arm through his and they went in, moving slowly and in silence from room to room. Only the almost convulsive pressure of her arm on his told him of a happiness too deep for expression.

On the landing above he offered her the key to her mother's room.

"Nothing is changed there," he said; and, fitting the key, unlocked the door, and turned away.

But the girl caught his hand in hers and drew him with her into the faded, shabby room where her mother's chair stood in its accustomed place, and the faded hassock lay beside it.

"Sit here," she said. And when he was seated she dropped on the hassock at his feet and laid her cheek on his knees.

The room was very still and sunny; her lover remained silent and unstirring; and the girl's eyes wan-

dered from carpet to ceiling and from wall to wall, resting on familiar objects; then, passing dreamily, remained fixed on space — sweet, brooding eyes, dim with the deepest emotion she had ever known.

A new, profound, and thrilling peace possessed her — a heavenly sense of tranquillity and security, as though, somehow, all problems had been solved for her and for him.

Presently in a low, hushed, happy voice she began to speak about her mother. Little unimportant, unconnected incidents came to her mind — brief moments, episodes as ephemeral as they had been insignificant.

Sitting on the faded hassock at his feet she lifted her head and rested both arms across his knees.

"It is all so perfect now," she said,—"you here in mother's room, and I at your feet: and the sunny world waiting for us outside. How mellow is this light! Always in the demi-dusk of this house there seemed to me to linger a golden tint — even on dark days — even at night — as though somewhere a ray of sun had been lost and had not entirely faded out."

"It came from your own heart, Athalie — that wonderful and golden heart of yours where light and warmth can never die. . . . Dear, are you contented with what I have ventured to do?"

She looked silently into his eyes, then with a little sigh dropped her head on his knees again.

Far away somewhere in the depths of the house somebody was moving. And presently she asked him who it was.

"Connor, the man of all work. I sent him to Spring

Pond village to buy bed linen and bath towels. I ventured to install a brass bed or two in case you had thought of coming here with your maid. You see," he added, smiling, "it was fortunate that I did."

"You are the most wonderful man in the world, Clive," she murmured, her eyes fixed dreamily on his face. "Always you have been making life delightful for me; smoothing my path, helping me where the road is rough." . . . She sighed: "Clive, you are very wonderful to me."

Mrs. Jim Connor had come to help; and now, at high noon, she sought them where they were standing in the garden,— Athalie in ecstasy before the scented thickets of old-fashioned rockets massed in a long, broad border against a background of trees.

So they went in to luncheon, which was more of a dinner; and Mrs. Connor served them with apology, bustle, and not too garrulously for the humour they were in.

High spirits had returned to them when they stepped out of doors; and they came back to the house for luncheon in the gayest of humour, Athalie chattering away blithe as a linnet in a thorn bush, and Clive not a whit more reticent.

"Hafiz is going to adore this!" exclaimed the girl. "My angel pussy! — why was I mean enough to leave you in the city! . . . I'll have a dog, too — a soft, roly-poly puppy, who shall grow up with a wholesome respect for Hafiz. And, Clive! I shall have a nice fat

horse, a safe and sane old Dobbin — so I can poke about the countryside at my leisure, through byways and lanes and disused roads."

"You need a car, too."

"No, no, I really don't. Anyway," she said airily, "your car is sufficient, isn't it?"

"Of course," he smiled.

"I think so, too. I shall not require or desire a car unless you also are to be in it. But I'd love to possess a Dobbin and a double buckboard. Also I shall, in due time, purchase a sail-boat —" She checked herself, laughed at the sudden memory, and said with delightful malice: "I suppose you have not yet learned to sail a boat, have you?"

He laughed, too: "How you scorned me for my ignorance, didn't you? Oh, but I've learned a great many things since those days, Athalie."

"To sail a boat, too?"

"Oh, yes. I had to learn. There's a lot of water in the world; and I've been very far afield."

"I know," she said. There was a subtle sympathy in her voice,— an exquisite recognition of the lonely years which now seemed to lie far, far behind them both.

She glanced down at her fresh plate which Mrs. Connor had just placed before her.

"Clive!" she exclaimed, enchanted, "do you see! Peach turnovers!"

"Certainly. Do you suppose this housewarming could be a proper one without peach turnovers?" And to Mrs. Connor he said: "That is all, thank you.

Miss Greensleeve and I will eat our turnovers by the stove in the sun-parlour."

And there they ate their peach turnovers, seated on the old-time rush-bottomed chairs beside the stove — just as they had sat so many years ago when Athalie was a child of twelve and wore a ragged cloak and hood of red.

Sometimes, leisurely consuming her pastry, she glanced demurely at her lover, sometimes her blue eyes wandered to the sunny picture outside where roses grew and honeysuckle trailed and the blessed green grass enchanted the tired eyes of those who dwelt in the monstrous and arid city.

Presently she went away to the room he had prepared for her; and he lay back lazily in his chair and lighted a cigarette, and watched the thin spirals of smoke mounting through the sunshine. When she returned to him she was clad in white from crown to toe, and he told her she was enchanting, which made her eyes sparkle and the dimples come.

"Mrs. Connor is going to remain and help me," she said. "All my things are unpacked, and the bed is made very nicely, and it is all going to be too heavenly for words. Oh, I *wish* you could stay!"

"To-night?"

"Yes. But I suppose it would ruin us if anybody knew."

He said nothing as they walked back into the main hallway.

"What a charming old building it is!" she exclaimed. "Isn't it odd that I never before appreciated

the house from an esthetic angle? I don't suppose you'd call this architecture, but whatever else it may be it certainly is dignified. I adore the simplicity of the rooms; don't you? I shall have some pretty silk curtains made; and, in the bedrooms, chintz. And maybe you will help me hunt for furniture and rugs. Will you, dear?"

"We'll find some old mahogany for this floor and white enamel for the bedrooms if you like. What do you say?"

"Enchanting! I adore antique mahogany! You know how crazy I am about the furniture of bygone days. I shall squander every penny on things Chippendale and Sheraton and Hepplewhite. Oh, it is going to be a darling house and I'm the happiest girl in the world. And you have made me so! — dearest of men!"

She caught his hand to her lips as he bent to kiss hers, and their faces came together in a swift and clinging embrace. Which left her flushed and wordless for the moment, and disposed to hang her head as she walked slowly beside him to the front door.

Out in the sunshine, however, her self-possession returned in a pretty exclamation of delight; and she called his attention to a tiny rainbow formed in the spray of the garden hose where Connor was watering the grass.

"Symbol of hope for us," he said under his breath.

She nodded, and stood inhaling the fragrance of the garden.

"I know a path — if it still exists — where I used

to go as a child. Would you care to follow it with me?"

So they walked down to the causeway bridge spanning the outlet to Spring Pond, turned to the right amid a tangle of milk-weed in heavy bloom, and grape-vines hanging in festoons from rock and sapling.

The path had not changed; it wound along the wooded shore of the pond, then sloped upward and came out into a grassy upland, where it followed the woods' edge under the cool shadow of the trees.

And as they walked she told him of her childish journeys along this path until it reached the wooded and pebbly height of land beyond, which is one of the vertebræ in the backbone of Long Island.

To reach that ridge was her ultimate ambition in those youthful days; and when on one afternoon of reckless daring she had attained it, and far to the northward she saw the waters of the great Sound sparkling in the sun, she had felt like Balboa in sight of the Pacific, awed to the point of prayer by her own miraculous achievement.

Where the path re-entered the woods, far down the slope, they could hear the waters of Spring Brook flowing; and presently they could see the clear glint of the stream; and she told him tales of alder-poles and home-made hooks, and of dusky troutlings that haunted the woodland pools far in the dusk of leafy and mysterious depths.

On the brink of the slope, but firmly imbedded, there had been a big mossy log. She discovered it presently, and drew him down to a seat beside her, taking pos-

session of one of his arms and drawing it closely under her own. Then she crossed one knee over the other and looked out into the magic half-light of a woodland which, to her childish eyes, had once seemed a vast and depthless forest. A bar of sunlight fell across her slim shoe and ankle clothed in white, and across the log, making the moss greener than emeralds.

From far below came pleasantly the noise of the brook; overhead leaves stirred and whispered in the breezes; shadows moved; sun-spots waxed and waned on tree-trunk and leaf and on the brown ground under foot. A scarlet-banded butterfly — he they call the Red Admiral — flitted persistently about an oak tree where the stain of sap darkened the bark.

From somewhere came the mellow tinkle of cow-bells, which moved Athalie to speech; and she poured out her heart to Clive on the subject of domestic kine and of chickens and ducks.

"I'm a country girl; there can be no doubt about it," she admitted. "I do not think a day passes in the city but I miss the cock-crow and the plaint of barn-yard fowl, and the lowing of cattle and the whimper and coo of pigeons. And my country eyes grow weary for a glimpse of green, Clive,— and for wide horizons and the vast flotillas of white clouds that sail over pastures and salt meadows and bays and oceans. Never have I been as contented as I am at this moment — here — under the sky alone with you."

"That also is all I ask in life — the open world, and you."

"Maybe it will happen."

"Maybe."

"With everything — desirable —"

She dropped her eyes and remained very still. For the first time in her life she had thought of children as her own — and his. And the thought which had flashed unbidden through her mind left her silent, and a little bewildered by its sweetness.

He was saying: "You should, by this time, have the means which enable you to live in the country."

"Yes."

Cecil Reeve had advised her in her investments. The girl's financial circumstances were modest, but adequate and sound.

"I never told you how much I have," she said. "May I?"

"If you care to."

She told him, explaining every detail very carefully; and he listened, fascinated by this charming girl's account of how in four years, she had won from the world the traditional living to which all are supposed to be entitled.

"You see," she said, "that gives me a modest income. I could live here very nicely. It has always been my dream. . . . But of course everything now depends on where you are."

Surprised and touched he turned toward her: she flushed and smiled, suddenly realising the naïveté of her avowal.

"It's true," she said. "Every day I seem to become more and more entangled with you. I'm wondering whether I've already crossed the bounds of friendship,

and how far I am outside. I can't seem to realise any longer that there is no bond between us stronger than preference. . . . I was thinking — very unusual and very curious thoughts — about us both." She drew a deep, unsteady, but smiling, breath: "Clive, I wish you could marry me."

"You *wish* it, Athalie?" he asked, profoundly moved.

"Yes."

After a silence she leaned over and rested her cheek against his shoulder.

"Ah, yes," she said under her breath,—"that is what I begin to wish for. A home, and *you*. . . . And — children."

He put his arm around her.

"Isn't it strange, Clive, that I should think about children — at my age — and with little chance of ever having any. I don't know what possesses me to suddenly want them. . . . Wouldn't they be wonderful in that house? And they'd have that darling garden to play in. . . . There ought to be a boy — several in fact, and some girls. . . . *I'd* know what to do for them. Isn't it odd that I should know exactly how to bring them up. But I do. I know I do. . . . I can almost see them playing in the garden — I can see their dear little faces — hear their voices —"

His arm was clasping her slim body very tightly, but she suddenly sat upright, resting one slender hand on his shoulder; and her gaze became steady and fixed.

Presently he noticed it and turned his head in the same direction, but saw nothing except the sunlight

sifting through the trees and the golden half-light of the woods beyond.

"What is it, Athalie?" he asked.

She said in a curiously still voice: "Children."

"Where?"

"Playing in the woods."

"Where?" he repeated; "I do not see them."

She did not answer. Presently she closed her eyes and rested her face against his shoulder again, pressing close to him as though lonely.

"They went away," she said in answer to his question. . . . "I feel a little tired, Clive. . . . Do you care for me a great deal?"

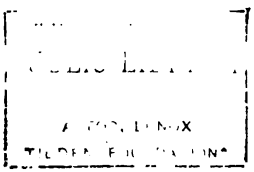
"Can you ask?"

"Yes. . . . Because of the years ahead of us. I think there are to be many — for us both. The future is so bewildering — like a tangled and endless forest, and very dim to see in. . . . But sometimes there comes a rift in the foliage — and there is a glimpse of far skies shining. And for a moment one — 'sees clearly' — into the depths — a little way. . . . And surmises something of what remains unseen. And imagines more, perhaps. . . . I wonder if you love me — enough."

"Dearest — dearest —"

"Let it remain unsaid, Clive. A girl must learn one day. But never from the asking. And the same sun shall continue to rise and set, whatever her answer is to be; and the moon, too; and the stars shall remain unchanged — whatever changes us. How still the woods are — as still as dreams."

"She suddenly sat upright, resting one slender hand on his shoulder."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She lifted her head, looked at him, smiled, then, freeing herself, sprang to her feet and stood a moment drawing her slim hand across her eyes.

"I shall have a tennis court, Clive. And a canoe on Spring Pond. . . . What kind of puppy was that I said I wanted?"

"One which would grow up with proper fear and respect for Hafiz," he said, smilingly, perplexed by the rapid sequence of her moods.

"A collie?"

"If you like."

"I wonder," she murmured, "whether they are safe for children —" She looked up laughing: "*Isn't* it odd! I simply cannot seem to free my mind of children whenever I think about that house."

As they moved along the path toward the new home he said: "What was it you saw in the woods?"

"Children."

"Were they — real?"

"No."

"Had they died?"

"They have not yet been born," she said in a low voice.

"I did not know you could see such things."

"I am not sure that I can. It is very difficult for me, sometimes, to distinguish between vividly imaginative visualisation and — other things."

Walking back through the soft afternoon light the girl tried to tell him all that she knew about herself and her clairvoyance — strove to explain, to make him understand, and, perhaps, to understand herself.

But after a while silence intervened between them; and when they spoke again they spoke of other things. For the isolation of souls is a solitude inviolable; there can be no intimacy there, only the longing for it — the craving, endless, unsatisfied.

CHAPTER XXIII

OVER the garden a waning moon silvered the water in the pool and picked out from banked masses of bloom a tall lily here and there.

All the blossom-spangled vines were misty with the hovering wings of night-moths. Through alternate bands of moonlight and dusk the jet from the pool split into a thin shower of palely flashing jewels, sometimes raining back on the water, sometimes drifting with the wind across the grass. And through the dim enchantment moved Athalie, leaning on Clive's arm, like some slim sorceress in a secret maze, silent, absent-eyed, brooding magic.

Already into her garden had come the little fantastic creatures of the night as though drawn thither by a spell to do her bidding. Like a fat sprite a speckled toad hopped and hobbled and scrambled from their path; a tiny snake, green as the grass blades that it stirred, slipped from a pool of moonlight into a lake of shadow. Somewhere a small owl, tremulously melodious, called and called: and from the salt meadows, distantly, the elfin whistle of plover answered.

Like some lost wanderer from the moon itself a great moth with nile-green wings fell flopping on the grass at the girl's feet. And Clive, wondering, lifted it gingerly for her inspection.

Together they examined the twin moons shining on

its translucent wings, the furry, snow-white body and the six downy feet of palest rose. Then, at Athalie's request, Clive tossed the angelic creature into the air; and there came a sudden blurr of black wings in the moonlight, and a bat took it.

But neither he nor she had seen in allegory the darting thing with devil's wings that dashed the little spirit of the moon into eternal night. And out of the black void above, one by one, flakes from the frail wings came floating.

To and fro they moved. She with both hands clasped and resting on his arm, peering through darkness down at the flowers, as one perfume, mounting, overpowered another — clove-pink, rocket, lily, and petunia, each in its turn dominant, triumphant.

Puffs of fragrance from the distant sea stirred the garden's tranquil air from time to time: somewhere honeyed bunches hung high from locust trees; and the salt meadow's aromatic tang lent savour to the night.

"I must go back to town," he said irresolutely.

He heard her sigh, felt her soft clasp tighten slightly over his arm. But she turned back in silence with him toward the house, passed in the open door before him, her fair head lowered, and stood so, leaning against the newel-post.

"Good night," he said in a low voice, still irresolute.

"Must you go?"

"I ought to."

"There is that other bedroom. And Mrs. Connor has gone home for the night."

"I told her to remain," he said sharply.

"I told her to go."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted you to stay — this first night here — with me — in the home of my youth which you have given to me again."

He came to her and looked into her eyes, framing her face between his hands:

"Dear, it would be unwise for me to remain."

"Because you love me?"

"No." He added with a forced smile: "I have put on armour in our behalf. No, that is not the reason."

"Then — may you not stay?"

"Suppose it became known? What would you do, Athalie?"

"Hold my head high . . . guilty or not."

"You don't know what you are saying."

"Not exactly, perhaps. . . . But I know that I have been changing. This day alone with you is finishing the transformation. I'm not sure just when it began. I realise, now, that it has been in process for a long, long while." She drew away from him, leaned back on the banisters.

"I may not have much time; — I want to be candid — I want to think honestly. I don't desire to deny even to myself that I am now become what I am — a stranger to myself."

He said, still with his forced smile; "What pretty and unknown stranger have you so suddenly discovered in yourself, Athalie?"

She looked up at him, unsmiling: "A stranger to

celibacy. . . . Why do you not take me, Clive?"

"Do you understand what you are saying!"

"Yes. And now I can understand anything *you* may say or do . . . I couldn't, yesterday." She turned her face away from him and folded her hands over the newel-post. And, not looking at him, she said: "Since we have been here alone together I have known a confidence and security I never dreamed of. Nothing now matters, nothing causes apprehension, nothing of fear remains — not even that ignorance of fear which the world calls innocence.

"I am what I am; I am not afraid to be and live what I have become. . . . I am capable of love. Yesterday I was not. I have been fashioned to love, I think. . . . But there is only one man who can make me certain. . . . My trust and confidence are wholly his — as fearlessly as though he had become this day my husband. . . .

"And if he will stay, here under this roof which is not mine unless it is his also — here in this house where, within the law or without it, nevertheless everything is his — then he enters into possession of what is his own. And I at last receive my birthright,— which is to serve where I am served, love where love is mine — with gratitude, and unafraid —"

Her voice trembled, broke; she covered her face with her hands; and when he took her in his arms she leaned her forehead against his breast:

—"Oh, Clive — I can't deny them! — How can I deny them? — The little flower-like faces, pleading to me for life! — And their tender arms — around my

neck — there in the garden, Clive! — The winsome lips on mine, warm and heavenly sweet; and the voices calling, calling from the golden woodland, calling from meadow and upland, height and hollow! — And sometimes like far echoes of wind-blown laughter they call me — gay little voices, confident and sweet; and sometimes, winning and shy, they whisper close to my cheek — mother! — mother —"

His arms fell from her and he stepped back, trembling.

She lifted her pale tear-stained face. And, save for the painted Virgins of an ancient day he never before had seen such spiritual passion in any face — features where nothing sensuous had ever left an imprint; where the sensitive, tremulous mouth curved with the loveliness of a desire as innocent as a child's.

And he read there no taint of lesser passion, nothing of less noble emotion; only a fearless and overwhelming acknowledgment of her craving to employ the gifts with which her womanhood endowed her — love and life, and service never ending.

In her mother's room they sat long talking, her hands resting on his, her fresh and delicate face a pale white blurr in the dusk.

It was very late before he went to the room allotted him, knowing that he could not hope for sleep. Seated there by his open window he heard the owl's tremolo rise, quaver, and die away in the moonlight; he heard the murmuring plaint of marsh-fowl, and the sea-breeze stirring the reeds.

Now, in this supreme crisis of his life, looking out into darkness he saw a star fall, leaving an incandescent curve against the heavens which faded slowly as he looked.

Into an obscurity as depthless, his soul was peering, now, naked, unarmoured, clasping hands with hers. And every imperious and furious tide that sweeps the souls and bodies of men now mounted overwhelmingly and set toward her. It seemed at moments as though their dragging was actually moving his limbs from where he sat; and he closed his eyes and his strong hand fell on the sill, grasping it as though for anchorage.

Now,— if there were in him anything higher than the mere clay that clotted his bones — now was the moment to show it. And if there were a diviner armour within reach of his unsteady hand, he must don it now and rivet it fast in the name of God.

Darkness is a treacherous councillor; he rose heavily, and turned the switch, flooding the room with light, then flung himself across the bed, his clenched fists over his face.

In his ears he seemed to hear the dull roar of the current which, so far through life, had borne him on its crest, tossing, hurling him whither it had listed.

It should never again have its will of him. This night he must set his course forever.

"Clive!"

But the faint, clear call was no more real, and no less, than the voice which was ringing always in his ears, now,— no softer, no less winning.

"Clive!"

After a moment he raised himself to his elbows and gazed, half-blinded, toward the door. Then he got clumsily to his feet, stumbled across the floor, and opened it.

She stood there in her frail chamber robe of silk and swansdown, smiling, forlornly humorous, and displaying a book as symbol of her own insomnia.

"Can't you sleep?" she asked. "We'll both be dead in the morning. I thought I'd better tell you to go to sleep when I saw your light break out. . . . So I've come to tell you."

"How could you see that my window was lighted?"

"I was leaning out of my window listening to the little owl, and suddenly I saw the light from yours fall criss-cross across the grass. . . . Can't you sleep?"

"Yes. I'll turn out the light. Will *you* promise to go to sleep?"

"If I can. The night is so beautiful —"

With a gay little smile and gesture she turned away; but halfway down the corridor she hesitated and looked back at him.

"If you are sleepless," she called softly, "you may wake me and I'll talk to you."

There was a window at the end of the corridor. He saw her continue on past her door and stand there looking out into the garden. She was still standing there when he closed his door and went back to his chair.

The night seemed interminable; its moonlit fragrance unendurable. With sleepless eyes he gazed into the darkness, appalled at the future — fearing such nights

to come — nights like this, alone with her; and the grim battle to be renewed, inexorably renewed until that day should come — if ever it was to come — when he dared take in the name of God what Destiny had already made his own, and was now clamouring for him to take.

After a long while he rose from the window, went to his door again, opened it and looked out. And saw her still leaning against the window at the corridor's dim end.

She looked around, laughing softly as he came up: "All this — the night, the fragrance, and you, have hopelessly bewitched me. I can't sleep; I don't wish to. . . . But you, poor boy — you haven't even undressed. You look very tired and white, Clive. Why is it you can't sleep?"

He did not answer.

"Shall I get my book and read aloud to you? It's silly stuff — love, and such things. Shall I?"

"No — I'm going back," he answered curtly.

She glanced around at him curiously. For, that day, a new comprehension of men and their various humours had come to enlighten her; she had begun to understand even where she could not feel.

And so, tenderly, gently, in shy sympathy with the powerful currents that swept this man beside her,— but still herself ignorant of their power, she laid her cool cheek against his, drawing his head closer.

"Dearest — dearest —" she murmured vaguely.

His head turned, and hers turned instinctively to meet it; and her arms crept up around his neck.

Then of a sudden she had freed herself, stepped back,

one nervous arm outflung as if in self-defence. But her hand fell, caught on the window-sill and clung there for support; and she rested against it breathing rapidly and unevenly.

"Athalie — dear."

"Let me go now —"

Her lips burned for an instant under his; were wrenched away:

"Let me go, Clive —"

"You must not tremble so —"

"I can't help it . . . I am afraid. I want to go, now. I — I want to go —"

There was a chair by the window; she sank down on it and dropped her head back against the wall behind.

And, as he stood there beside her, over her shoulder through the open window he saw two men in the garden below, watching them.

Presently she lifted her head. His eyes remained fixed on the men below who never moved.

She said with an effort; "Are you displeased, Clive?"

"No, my darling."

"It was not because I do not love you. Only — I —"

"I know," he whispered, his eyes fixed steadily on the men.

After a silence she said under her breath: "I understand better now why I ought to wait for you — if there is any hope for us,— as long as there is any chance. And after that — if there is no chance for us — then nothing can matter."

"I know."

"To-night, earlier, I did not understand why I should deny myself to myself, to you, to *them*. . . . I did not understand that what I wished for so treacherously masked a — a lesser impulse —"

He said, quietly: "Nothing is surer than that you and I, one day, shall face our destiny together. I really care nothing for custom, law, or folk-way, or dogma, excepting only for your sake. Outside of that, man's folk-ways, man's notions of God, mean nothing to me: only my own intelligence and belief appeal to me. I must guide myself."

"Guide me, too," she said. "For I have come into a wisdom which dismays me."

He nodded and looked down, calmly, at the two men who had not stirred from the shadow of the foliage.

She rose to her feet, hesitated, slowly stretched out her hand, then, on impulse, pressed it lightly against his lips.

"That demonstration," she said with a troubled laugh, "is to be our limit. Good night. You will try to sleep, won't you? . . . And if I am now suddenly learning to be a little shy with you — you will not mistake me; will you? . . . Because it may seem silly at this late date . . . But, somehow, everything comes late to me — even love, and its lesser lore and its wisdom and its cunning. So, if I ever seem indifferent — don't doubt me, Clive . . . Good night."

When she had entered her room and closed the door he went downstairs, swiftly, let himself out of the house, and moved straight toward the garden.

Neither of the men seemed very greatly surprised; both retreated with docile alacrity across the lawn to the driveway gate.

"Anyway," said the taller man, good-humouredly, "you've got to hand it to us, Mr. Bailey. I guess we pinch the goods on you all right *this* time. What about it?"

But Clive silently locked the outer gates, then turned and stared at the shadowy house as though it had suddenly crumbled into ruins there under the July moon.

CHAPTER XXIV

A FINE lace-work of mist lay over the salt meadows; the fairy trilling of the little owl had ceased. Marsh-fowl were sleepily astir; the last firefly floated low into the shrouded bushes and its lamp glimmered a moment and went out.

Where the east was growing grey long lines of wild-ducks went stringing out to sea; a few birds sang loudly in meadows still obscure; cattle in foggy upland pastures were awake.

When the first cock-crow rang, cow-bells had been clanking for an hour or more; the rising sun turned land and sea to palest gold; every hedge and thicket became noisy with birds; bay-men stepped spars and hoisted sail, and their long sweeps dripped liquid fire as they pulled away into the blinding glory of the east.

And Clive rose wearily from his window chair, careworn and haggard, with nothing determined, nothing solved of this new and imminent peril which was already menacing Athalie with disgrace and threatening him with that unwholesome notoriety which men usually survive but under which a woman droops and perishes.

He bathed, dressed again, dully uneasy in the garments of yesterday, uncomfortable for lack of fresh linen and toilet requisites; little things indeed to add

such undue weight to his depression. And only yesterday he had laughed at inconvenience and had still found charm to thrill him in the happy unconventionality of that day and night.

Connor was already weeding in the garden when he went out; and the dull surprise in the Irishman's sunburnt visage sent a swift and painful colour into his own pallid face.

"Miss Greensleeve was kind enough to put me up last night," he said briefly.

Connor stood silent, slowly combing the soil from the claw of his weeder with work-worn fingers.

Clive said: "Since I have been coming down here to watch the progress on Miss Greensleeve's house have you happened to notice any strangers hanging about the grounds?"

Connor's grey eyes narrowed and became fixed on nothing.

Presently he nodded to himself:

"There was inquiries made, sorr, I'm minded now that ye mention it."

"About me?"

"Yes, sor. There was strangers askin' f'r to know was it you that owns the house or what."

"What was said?"

"I axed them would they chase themselves,— it being none o' their business. 'Twas no satisfaction they had of me, Misther Bailey, sorr."

"Who were they, Connor?"

"I just disremember now. Maybe there was a big wan and a little wan . . . Yes, sorr; there was two

of them hangin' about on and off these six weeks past, like they was minded to take a job and then again not minded. Sure there was the two o' thim, now I think of it. Wan was big and thin and wan was a little scutt wid a big nose."

Clive nodded: "Keep them off the place, Connor. Keep all strangers outside. Miss Greensleeve will be here for several days alone and she must not be annoyed."

"Divil a bit, sorr."

"I want you and Mrs. Connor to sleep in the house for the present. And I do not wish you to answer any questions from anybody concerning either Miss Greensleeve or myself. Can I depend on you?"

"You can, sorr."

"I'm sure of it. Now, I'd like to have you go to the village and buy me something to shave with and to comb my hair with. I had not intended to remain here over night, but I did not care to leave Miss Greensleeve entirely alone in the house."

"Sure, sorr, Jenny was fixed f'r to stay—"

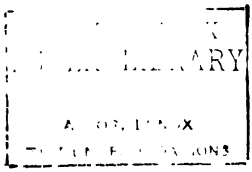
"I know. Miss Greensleeve told her she might go home. It was a misunderstanding. But I want her to remain hereafter until Miss Greensleeve's servants come from New York."

So Connor went away to the village and Clive seated himself on a garden bench to wait.

Nothing stirred inside the house; the shades in Athalie's room remained lowered.

He watched the chimney swifts soaring and darting above the house. A faint dun-coloured haze crowned

"Clive nodded: 'Keep them off the place, Connor.'"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the kitchen chimney. Mrs. Connor was already busy over their breakfast.

When the gardener returned with the purchases Clive went to his room again and remained there busy until a knock on the door and Mrs. Connor's hearty voice announced breakfast.

As he stepped out into the passage-way he met Athalie coming from her room in a soft morning negligée, and still yawning.

She bade him good morning in a sweet, sleepy voice, linked her white, lace-clouded arm in his, glanced sideways at him, humorously ashamed:

"I'm a disgrace," she said; "I could have slain Mrs. Connor when she woke me. Oh, Clive, I *am* so sleepy!"

"Why did you get up?"

"My dear, I'm also hungry; that is why. I could scent the coffee from afar. And you know, Clive, if you ever wish to hopelessly alienate my affections, you have only to deprive me of my breakfast. Tell me, did you get *any* sleep?"

He forced a smile: "I had sufficient."

"I wonder," she mused, looking at his somewhat haggard features.

They found the table prepared for them in the sun-parlour; Athalie presided at the coffee urn, but became a trifle flushed and shy when Mrs. Connor came in bearing a smoking cereal.

"I made a mistake in allowing you to go home," said the girl, "so I thought it best for Mr. Bailey to remain."

"Sure I was that worritted," burst out Mrs. Connor, "I was minded to come back — what with all the thramps and Dagoes hereabout, and no dog on the place, and you alone; so I sez to my man Cornelius,—'Neil,' sez I, 'it's not right,' sez I, 'f'r to be lavin' th' young lady —'"

"Certainly," interrupted Clive quietly, "and you and Neil are to sleep in the house hereafter until Miss Greensleeve's servants arrive."

"I'm not afraid," murmured Athalie, looking at him with lazy amusement over the big, juicy peach she was preparing. But when Mrs. Connor retired her expression changed.

"You dear fellow," she said, "You need not ever be worried about me."

"I'm not, Athalie —"

"Oh, Clive! Aren't you always going to be honest with me?"

"Why do you think I am anxious concerning you when Connor and his wife —"

"Dearest!"

"What?" He looked across at her where she was serenely preparing his coffee; and when she had handed the cup to him she shook her head, gravely, as though in gentle disapproval of some inward thought of his.

"What is it?" he asked uneasily.

"You know already."

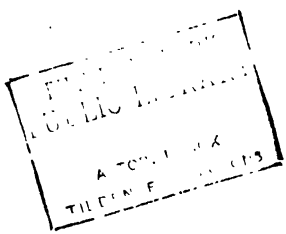
"What *is* it?" he repeated, reddening.

"Must *I* tell *you*, Clive?"

"I think you had better."

"*You* should have told *me*, dear. . . . Don't ever

"'Sure I was that worritted,' burst out Mrs. Connor."



fear to tell me what concerns us both. Don't think that leaving me in ignorance of unpleasant facts is any kindness to me. If anything happens to cause you anxiety, I should feel humiliated if you were left to endure it all alone."

He remained silent, troubled, uncertain as yet, how much she knew of what had happened in the garden the night before.

"Clive, dear, don't let this thing spoil anything for us. I know about it. Don't let any shadow fall upon this house of ours."

"You saw me last night in the garden."

Between diffidence and the candour that characterised her, she hesitated; then:

"Dear, a very strange thing has happened. Until last night never in all my life, try as I might, could I ever 'see clearly' anything that concerned you. Never have I been able to 'find' you anywhere — even when my need was desperate — when my heart seemed breaking —"

She checked herself, smiled at him; then her eyes grew dark and thoughtful, and a deeper colour burned in her cheeks.

"I'll try to tell you," she said. "Last night, after I left you, I lay thinking about — love. And the — the new knowledge of myself disconcerted me. . . . There remained a vague sense of dismay and — humiliation —" She bent her head over her folded hands, silent until the deepening colour subsided.

Still with lowered eyes she went on, steadily enough: "My instinct was to escape — I don't know exactly

how to tell this to you, dear,— but the impulse to escape possessed me — and I felt that I must rise from the lower planes and free myself from a — a lesser passion — slip from the menace of its control — become clean again of everything that is not of the spirit. . . . Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"So I rose and knelt down and said my prayers . . . And asked to be instructed because of my inexperience with — with these new and deep — emotions. And then I lay down, very tranquil again, leaving the burden with God. . . . All concern left me,— and the restless sense of shame. I turned my head on the pillow and looked out into the moonlight. . . . And, gently, naturally, without any sense of effort, I left my body where it lay in the moonlight, and — and found myself in the garden. Mother was there. You, also, were there; and two men with you."

His eyes never left her face; and now she looked up at him with a ghost of a smile:

"Mother spoke of the loveliness of the flowers. I heard her, but I was listening to you. Then I followed you where you were driving the two men from the grounds. I understood what had happened. After you went into the house again my mother and I saw you watching by your window. I was sorry that you were so deeply disturbed.

"Because what had occurred did not cause me any anxiety whatever."

"Do you mean," he said hoarsely, "that the probability of your name being coupled with mine and

dragged through the public mire does not disconcert you?"

"No."

"Why not? Is it because your clairvoyance reassures you as to the outcome of all this?"

"Dear," she said, gently, "I know no more of the outcome than you do. I know nothing more concerning our future than do you — excepting, only, that we shall journey toward it together, and through it to the end, accomplishing the destiny which links us each to the other . . . I know no more than that."

"Then why are you so serene under the menace of this miserable affair? For myself I care nothing; I'd thank God for a divorce on any terms. But you — dearest — dearest! — I cannot endure the thought of you entangled in such a shameful —"

"Where is the shame, Clive? The real shame, I mean. In me there are two selves; neither have, as yet, been disgraced by any disobedience of any law framed by men for women. Nor shall I break men's laws — under which women are governed without their own consent — unless no other road to our common destiny presents itself for me to follow." . . . She smiled, watching his intent and sombre face:

"Don't fear for me, dear. I have come to understand what life is, and I mean to live it, wholesomely, gloriously, uncrippled in body and mind, unmaimed by folk-ways and by laws as ephemeral —" she turned toward the open windows — "as those frail-winged things that float in the sunshine above Spring Pond, yonder, born at sunrise, and at sundown dead."

She laughed, leaning there on her dimpled elbows, stripping a peach of its velvet skin:

"The judges of the earth,—and the power of them! — What is it, dear, compared to the authority of love! To-day men have their human will of men, judging, condemning, imprisoning, slaying, as the moral fashion of the hour dictates. To-morrow folk-ways change; judge and victim vanish along with fashions obsolete — both alike, their brief reign ended.

"For judge and victim are awake at last; and in the twinkling of an eye, the old world has become a memory or a shrine for those tranquil pilgrims who return to worship for a while where love lies sleeping . . . And then return no more."

She rose, signed him to remain seated, came around to where he sat, and perched herself on the arm of his chair.

"If you don't mind," she said, "I shall smooth out that troubled crease between your eyebrows." And she encircled his head with both arms, and laid her smooth hands across his forehead. Then she touched his hair lightly, with her lips.

"We are great sinners," she murmured, "are we not, my darling?"

And drew his head against her breast.

"Of what am I robbing *her*, Clive? Of the power to humiliate you, make you unhappy. It is an honest theft.

"What else am I stealing from her? Not love, not gratitude, not duty, nothing of tenderness, nor of pride nor sympathy. I take nothing, then, from her. She

has nothing for me to steal — unless it be the plain gold ring she never wears. . . . And I prefer a new one — if, indeed, I am to wear one."

He said, deeply troubled, "How do you know she never wears a ring?" And he turned and looked up at her over his shoulder. The clear azure of her eyes was like a wintry sky.

"Clive, I know more than that. I know that your wife is in New York."

"What!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"I have been aware of it for weeks," she said tranquilly.

He remained silent; she continued to caress his hair:

"Your wife," she went on thoughtfully, "will learn much when she dies. There is a compulsory university course which awaits us all,— a school with many forms and many grades and many, many pupils. But we must die before we can be admitted. . . . I have never before spoken to you as I have spoken to-day. . . . Perhaps I never shall again. . . . The world is a blind place — lovely but blind.

"As for the woman who wears your name but wears no ring of yours she has been moving through my crystal for many days; — I would have made no effort to intrude on her had she not persisted in the crystal, haunted it,— I cannot tell you why — only that she is always there, now. . . . And last night I knew that she was in New York, and why she had come here. . . . Shall you see her to-day?"

"Where is she?"

"At the Regina."

"Are you sure?"

The girl calmly closed her eyes for a moment. After a brief silence she opened them: "She is still there. . . . She will awake in a little while and ring for her breakfast. The two men you drove out of the garden last night are waiting to see her. There is another man there. I think he is your wife's attorney. . . . Have you decided to see her?"

"Yes."

"You won't let what she may say about me trouble you, will you?"

"What will she say?" he asked with the naïve confidence of absolute and childish faith.

Athalie laughed: "Darling! I don't know. I'm not a witch or a sorceress. Did you think I was? — just because I can see a little more clearly than you?"

"I didn't know what your limit might be," he answered, smiling slightly, in spite of his deep anxiety.

"Then let me inform you at once. My eyes are better than many people's. Also my *other* self can see. And with so clear a vision, and with intelligence — and with a very true love and reverence for God — somehow I seem to visualise what clairvoyance, logic, and reason combine to depict for me.

"I used to be afraid that a picturesque and vivid imagination coupled with a certain amount of clairvoyance might seduce me to trickery and charlatanism.

"But if it be charlatanism for a paleontologist to construct a fish out of a single fossil scale, then there may be something of that ability in me. For truly, Clive,

I am often at a loss where to draw the line between what I see and what I reason out — between my clairvoyance and my deductions. And if I made mistakes I certainly should be deeply alarmed. But — I don't," she added, laughing. "And so, in regard to those two men last night, and in regard to what *she* and they may be about, I feel not the least concern. And you must not. Promise me, dear."

But he rose, anxious and depressed, and stood silent for a few moments, her hands clasped tightly in his.

For he could see no way out of it, now. His wife, once merely indifferent, was beginning to evince malice. And what further form that malice might take he could not imagine; for hitherto, she had not desired divorce, and had not concerned herself with him or his behaviour.

As for Athalie, it was now too late for him to step out of her life. He might have been capable of the sacrifice if the pain and unhappiness were to be borne by him alone — or even if he could bring himself to believe or even hope that it might be merely a temporary sorrow to Athalie.

But he could not mistake her, now; their cords of love and life were irrevocably braided together; and to cut one was to sever both. There could be no recovery from such a measure for either, now.

What was he to do? The woman he had married had rejected his loyalty from the very first, suffered none of his ideas of duty to move her from her aloofness. She cared nothing for him, and she let him know it; his notions of marriage, its duties and obligations merely aroused in her contempt. And when he finally under-

stood that the only kindness he could do her was to keep his distance, he had kept it. And what was he to do now? Granted that he had brought it all upon himself, how was he to combat what was threatening Athalie?

His wife had so far desired nothing of him, not even divorce. He could not leave Athalie and he could not marry her. And now, on her young head he had, somehow, loosened this avalanche, whatever it was — a suit for separation, probably — which, if granted, would leave him without his liberty, and Athalie disgraced. And even suppose his wife desired divorce for some new and unknown reason. The sinister advent of those men meant that Athalie would be shamefully named in any such proceedings.

What was he to do? An ugly, hunted look came into his face and he swung around and faced the girl beside him:

"Athalie," he said, "will you go away with me and let them howl?"

"Dearest, how silly. I'll stay *here* with you and let them howl."

"I don't want you to face it —"

"I shall not turn my back on it. Oh, Clive, there are so many more important things than what people may say about us!"

"You can't defy the world!"

"I'm not going to, darling. But I may possibly shock a few of the more orthodox parasites that infest it."

"No girl can maintain that attitude."

"A girl can try . . . And, if law and malice force

me to become your mistress, malice and law may answer for it; not I!"

"*I* shall have to answer for it."

"Dearest," she said with smiling tenderness, "you are still very, very orthodox in your faith in folk-ways. That need not cause *me* any concern, however. But, Clive, of the two pictures which seems reasonable — your wife who is no wife; your mistress who is more and is considered less?

"Don't think that I am speaking lightly of wifehood. . . . I desire it as I desire motherhood. I was made for both. If the world will let me I shall be both wife and mother. But if the world interferes to stultify me, then, nevertheless I shall still be both, and the law can keep the title it refuses me. I deny the right of man to cripple, mar, render sterile my youth and womanhood. I deny the right of the world to forbid me love, and its expression, as long as I harm no one by loving. Clive, it would take a diviner law than man's notions of divinity, to kill in me the right to live and love and bring the living into life. And if I am forbidden to do it in the name of the law, then I dare do it in the name of One who never turned his back on little children —"

She ceased abruptly; and he saw her eyes suddenly blinded by tears:

"Oh, Clive — if you only could have seen them — the little flower-like faces and pleading arms around — my — neck — warm — Oh, sweet! — sweet against my breast —"

CHAPTER XXV

WINIFRED had grown stout, which, on a slim, small-boned woman is quickly apparent; and, to Clive, her sleepy, uncertain grey eyes seemed even nearer together than he remembered them.

She was seated in the yellow and white living-room of her apartment at the Regina, still holding the card he had sent up; and she made no movement to rise when her maid announced him and ushered him in, or to greet him at all except with a slight nod and a slighter gesture indicating a chair across the room.

He said: "I did not know until this morning that you were in this country."

"Was it necessary to inform you?"

"No, not necessary," he said, "unless you have come to some definite decision concerning our future relations."

Her eyes seemed to grow sleepier and nearer together than ever.

"Why," he asked, wearily, "have you employed an agency to have me followed?"

She lifted her drooping lids and finely pencilled brows. "Have you been followed?"

"At intervals, as you know. Would you mind saying why? Because you have always been welcome to divorce."

She sat silent, slowly tearing into tiny squares the card he had sent up. Presently, as at an afterthought, she collected all the fragments and placed them in a heap on the table beside her.

"Well?" she inquired, glancing up at him. "Is that all you have to say?"

"I don't know what to say until you tell me why you have had me followed and why you yourself are here."

Her gaze remained fixed on the heap of little pasteboard squares which she shifted across the polished table-top from one position to another. She said:

"The case against you was complete enough before last night. I fancy even you will admit that."

"You are wrong," he replied wearily. "Somehow or other I believe you know that you are wrong. But I suppose a jury might not think so."

"Would you care to tell a jury that this trance-medium is not your mistress?"

"I should not care to defend her on such a charge before a jury or before anybody. There are various ways of damning a woman; and to defend her from that accusation is one of them."

"And another way?"

"To admit the charge. Either ruin her in the eyes of the truly virtuous."

"What do you expect to do about it then? Keep silent?"

"That is still a third way of destroying a woman."

"Really? Then what are you going to do?"

"Whatever you wish," he said in a low voice, "as

long as you do not bring such a charge against Athalie Greensleeve."

"Would you set your signature to a paper?"

"I have given you my word. I have never lied to you."

She looked up at him out of narrowing eyes:

"You might this time. I prefer your signature."

He reddened and sat twirling the silver crook of his walking-stick between restless hands.

"Very well," he said quietly; "I will sign what you wish, with the understanding that Miss Greensleeve is to remain immune from any lying accusation . . . And I'll tell you now that any accusation questioning her chastity is a falsehood."

His wife smiled: "You see," she said, "your signature *will* be necessary."

"Do you think I am lying?"

"What do I care whether you are or not? Do you suppose the alleged chastity of a common fortune-teller interests me? All I know is that you have found your level, and that I need protection. If you choose to concede it to me without a public scandal, I shall permit you to do so. If not, I shall begin an action against you and name the woman with whom you spent last night!"

There was, in the thin, flute-like, and mincingly fastidious voice something so subtly vicious that her words left him silent.

Still leisurely arranging and re-arranging her little heap of pasteboard, her near-set eyes intent on its symmetry, she spoke again:

"I could marry Innisbrae or any one of several others! But I do not care to; I am comfortable. And that is where you have made your mistake. I do not desire a divorce! But,"— she lifted her narrow eyes — "if you force me to a separation I shall not shrink from it. And I shall name that woman."

"Then — what is it you want?" he asked with a sinking heart.

"Not a divorce; not even a separation; merely respectability. I wish you to give up business in New York and present yourself in England at decent intervals of — say once every year. What you do in the interludes is of no interest to me. As long as you do not establish a business and a residence anywhere I don't care what you do. You may come back and live with this woman if you choose."

After a silence he said: "Is that what you propose?"

"It is."

"And you came over here to collect sufficient evidence to force me?"

"I had no other choice."

He nodded: "By your own confession, then, you believe either in her chastity and my sense of honour, or that, even guilty, I care so much for her that any threat against her happiness can effectually coerce me."

"Your language is becoming a trifle involved."

"No; *I* am involved. I realise it. And if I am not absolutely honourable and unselfish in this matter I shall involve the woman I had hoped to marry."

"I thought so," she said, reverting to her heap of pasteboard.

"If you think so," he continued, "could you not be a little generous?"

"How?"

"Divorce me — not by naming her — and give me a chance in life."

"No," she said coolly, "I don't care for a divorce. I am comfortable enough. Why should I inconvenience myself because you wish to marry your mistress?"

"In decency and in — charity — to me. It will cost you little. You yourself admit that it is a matter of personal indifference to you whether or not you are entirely and legally free of me."

"Did you ever do anything to deserve my generosity?" she inquired coldly.

"I don't know. I have tried."

"I have never noticed it," she retorted with a slight sneer.

He said: "Since my first offence against you — and against myself — which was marrying you — I have attempted in every way I knew to repair the offence, and to render the mistake endurable to you. And when I finally learned that there was only one way acceptable to you, I followed that way and kept myself out of your sight.

"My behaviour, perhaps, entitles me to no claim upon your generosity, yet I did my best, Winifred, as unselfishly as I knew how. Could you not; in your turn, be a little unselfish now? . . . Because I have a chance for happiness — if you would let me take it."

She glanced at him out of her close-set, sleepy eyes:

"I would not lift a finger to oblige you," she said. "You have inconvenienced me, annoyed me, disarranged my tranquil, orderly, and blameless mode of living, causing me social annoyance and personal irritation by coming here and engaging in business, and living openly with a common and notorious woman who practises a fraudulent and vulgar business.

"Why should I show you any consideration? And if you really have fallen so low that you are ready to marry her, do you suppose it would be very flattering for me to have it known that your second wife, my successor, was such a woman?"

He sat thinking for a while, his white, care-worn face framed between his gloved hands.

"Your friends," he said in a low voice, "know you as a devout woman. You adhere very strictly to your creed. Is there nothing in it that teaches forbearance?"

"There is nothing in it that teaches me to compromise with evil," she retorted; and her small cupid-bow mouth, grew pinched.

"If you honestly believe that this young girl is really my mistress," he said, "would it not be decent of you, if it lies within your power, to permit me to regularise my position — and hers?"

"Is it any longer my affair if you and she have publicly damned yourselves?"

"Yet if you do believe me guilty, you can scarcely deny me the chance of atonement, if it is within your power."

She lifted her eyes and coolly inspected him: "And suppose I do *not* believe you guilty of breaking your marriage vows?" she inquired.

He was silent.

"Am I to understand," she continued, "that you consider it my duty to suffer the inconvenience of divorcing you in order that you may further advertise this woman by marrying her?"

He looked into her close-set eyes; and hope died. She said: "If you care to affix your signature to the agreement which my attorneys have already drawn up, then matters may remain as they are, provided you carry out your part of the contract. If you don't, I shall begin action immediately and I shall name the woman on whose account you seem to entertain such touching anxiety."

"Is that your threat?"

"It is my purpose, dictated by every precept of decency, morality, religion, and the inviolable sanctity of marriage."

He laughed and gathered up his hat and stick:

"Your moral suasion, I am afraid, slightly resembles a sort of sanctimonious blackmail, Winifred. The combination of morality, religion, and yourself is too powerful for me to combat. . . . So if my choice must be between permitting morality to publicly besmirch this young girl's reputation, and affixing my signature to the agreement you suggest, I have no choice but to sign my name."

"Is that your decision?"

He nodded.

"Very well. My attorneys and a notary are in the next room with the papers necessary. If you would be good enough to step in a moment —"

He looked at her and laughed again: "Is there," he said, "anything lower than a woman? — or anything higher?"

CHAPTER XXVI

ATHALIE was having a wonderful summer. House and garden continued to enchant her. She brought down Hafiz, who, being a city cat, instantly fled indoors with every symptom of astonishment and terror the first time Athalie placed him on the lawn.

But within a week the dainty Angora had undergone a change of heart. Boldly, now he marched into the garden all by himself; fearlessly he pounced upon such dangerous game as crickets and grasshoppers and the little night moths which drifted among the flowers at twilight,— the favourite prowling hour of Hafiz, the Beautiful.

Also, early in July, Athalie had acquired a fat bay horse and a double buckboard; and, in the seventh heaven now, she jogged about the country through leafy lanes and thistle-bordered by-roads long familiar to her childhood, sometimes with basket, trowel, and garden gloves, intent on the digging and transplanting of ferns, sometimes with field-glasses and books, on ornithological information bent. More often she started out with only a bag of feed for Henry the horse and some luncheon for herself, to picnic all alone in a familiar woodland, haunted by childish memories,

and lie there listening to the bees and to the midsummer wind in softly modulated conversation with the little tree-top leaves.

She had brought her maid from the city; Mrs. Connor continued to rule laundry and kitchen. Connor himself decorated the landscape with his straw hat and overalls, weeding, spraying, rolling, driving the lawn-mower, raking bed and path, cutting and training vines, clipping hedges,— a sober, bucolic, agreeable figure to the youthful chatelaine of the house of Greensleeve.

Clive had come once more from town to say that he was sailing for England the following day; that he would be away a month all told, and that he would return by the middle of August.

They had spent the morning driving together in her buckboard — the happiest morning perhaps in their lives.

It promised to be a perfect day; and she was so carefree, so contented, so certain of the world's kindness, so shyly tender with him, so engagingly humorous at his expense, that the prospect of a month's separation ceased for the time to appal him.

Concerning his interview with his wife she had asked him nothing; nor even why he was going abroad. Whether she guessed the truth; whether she had come to understand the situation through other and occult agencies, he could not surmise. But one thing was plain enough; nothing that had happened or that threatened to happen was now disturbing her. And her gaiety and high spirits were reassuring him and tran-

quillising his mind to a degree for which, on reflection, he could scarcely account, knowing the ultimate hopelessness of their situation.

Yet her sheer good spirits carried him with her, heart and mind, that morning. And when it was time for him to go she said good-bye to him with a smile as tenderly gay and as happy and confident as though he were to return on the morrow. And went back to her magic house of dreams and her fairy garden, knowing that, except for him, their rainbow magic must vanish and the tinted spell fade, and the soft enchantment dissolve forever leaving at her feet only a sunlit ruin amid the stillness of desolation.

But the magic held. Every day she wrote him. Wireless messages came to her from him for a while; ceased; then re-commenced, followed presently by cablegrams and finally by letters.

So the magic held through the long sunny summer days. And Athalie worked in her garden and strayed far afield, both driving and afoot. And she studied and practised piano, and made curtains, and purchased furniture.

Also she wrote letters to her sisters, long since wedded to husbands, babies, and homes in the West. Her brother Jack, she learned, had joined the Navy at Puget Sound, and had now become a petty officer aboard the new battle-cruiser *Bon Homme Richard* in Asiatic waters. She wrote to him, also, and sent him a money order, gaily suggesting that he use it to educate himself as a good sailor should, and that he save his pay for a future wife and baby — the latter, as she wrote,

" being doubtless the most desirable attainment this side of Heaven."

In her bedroom were photographs of Catharine's children and of the little boy which Doris had brought into the world; and sometimes, in the hot midsummer afternoons, she would lie on her pillow and look at these photographs until the little faces faded to a glimmer as slumber dulled her eyes.

Captain Dane came once or twice to spend the day with her; and it was pleasant, afterward, for her to remember this big, blond, sunburnt man as part of all that she most cared for. Together they drove and walked and idled through house and garden: and when he went away, to sail the following day for those eternal forests which conceal the hearthstone of the Western World, he knew from her own lips about her love for Clive. He was the only person she ever told.

A few of her friends she asked to the house for quiet week-ends; the impression their visits made upon her was pleasant but colourless.

And it seemed singular, as she thought it over, how subordinate, how unaccented had always been all these people who came into her life, lingered, and faded out of it, leaving only the impressions of backgrounds and accessories against which only one figure stood clear and distinct — her lover's.

Yes, of all men she had ever known, only Clive seemed real; and he dominated every scene of her girlhood and her womanhood as her mother had been the only really living centre of her childhood.

All else seemed to her like a moving and subdued

background,— an endless series of grey scenes vaguely painted through which figures came and went, some shadowy and colourless as phantoms, some soberly outlined, some delicately tinted — but all more or less subordinate, more or less monochromatic, unimportant except for balance and composition, as painters use indefinite shapes and shades so that the eyes may more perfectly concentrate on the centre of their inspiration.

And the centre of all, for her, was Clive. Since her mother's death there had been no other point of view for her, no other focus for the forces of her mind, no other real desire, no other content. He had entered her child's life and had become, instantly, all that the child-world held for her. And it was so through the years of her girlhood. Absent, or during his brief reappearances, the central focus of her heart and mind was Clive. And, in womanhood, all forces in her mind and spirit and, now, of body, centred in this man who stood out against the faded tapestry of the world all alone for her, the only living thing on earth with which her heart had mated as a child, and in which now her mind and spirit had found Nirvana.

All men, all women, seemed to have their shadowy being only to make this man more real to her.

Friends came, remained, and went,— Cecil Reeve, gay, charmed with everything, and, as always, mischievously ready to pay court to her; Francis Hargrave, politely surprised but full of courteous admiration for her good taste; John Lyndhurst, Grismer, Harry Ferris, Young Welter, Arthur Ensart, and James Allys,— all were bidden for the day; all came,

marvelled in the several manners characteristic of them, and finally went their various ways, serving only, as always, to make clearer to her the fadeless memory of an absent man. For, to her, the merest thought of him was more real, more warm and vivid, than all of these, even while their eager eyes sought hers and their voices were sounding in her ears.

Nina Grey came with Anne Randolph for a week-end; and then came Jeanne Delauny, and Adele Millis. The memory of their visits lingered with Athalie as long, perhaps, as the scent of roses hangs in a dim, still room before the windows are open in the morning to the outer air.

The first of August a cicada droned from the hill-top woods and all her garden became saturated with the homely and bewitching odour of old-fashioned rockets.

On the grey wall nasturtiums blazed; long stretches of brilliant portulaca edged the herbaceous borders; clusters of auratum lilies hung in the transparent shadow of Cydonia and Spirea; and the first great dahlias faced her in maroon splendour from the spiked thickets along the wall.

Once or twice she went to town on shopping bent, and on one of these occasions impulse took her to the apartment furnished for her so long ago by Clive.

She had not meant to go in, merely intended to pass the house, speak to Michael, perhaps, if indeed, he still presided over door and elevator.

And there he was, outside the door on a chair, smoking his clay pipe and surveying the hot and silent street where not even a sparrow stirred.

"Michael," she said, smiling.

For a moment he did not know her, then: "God's glory!" he said huskily, getting to his feet —"is it the sweet face o' Miss Greensleeve or the angel in her come back f'r to bless us all?"

She gave him her hand, and he held it and looked at her, earnestly, wistfully; then, with the flashing change of his race, the grin broke out:

"I'm that proud to be remembered by the likes o' you, Miss Athalie! Are ye well, now? — an' happy? I thank God for that! I am substantial — with my respects, ma'am, f'r the kind inquiry. And Hafiz? Glory be, was there ever such a cat now? D'ye mind the day we tuk him in a bashket? — an' the sufferin' yowls of the poor, dear creature. Sure I'm that glad to hear he's well; — and manny mice to him, Miss Athalie!"

Athalie laughed: "I suppose all your tenants are away in the country," she ventured.

"Barrin' wan or two, Miss. Ye know the young Master will suffer no one in your own apartment."

"Is it still unoccupied, Michael?"

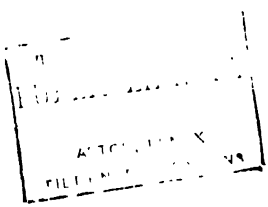
"Deed it is, Miss. Would ye care f'r to look around. There is nothing changed there. I dust it meself."

"Yes," said the girl in a low voice, "I will look at it."

So Michael took her up in the lift, unlocked the door for her, and then with the fine instinct of his race, forbore to follow her.

The shades in the square living-room were lowered; she raised one. And the dim, golden past took shadowy shape again before her eyes.

"'Michael,' she said, smiling."



She moved slowly from one object to another, touching caressingly where memory was tenderest. She looked at the furniture, the pictures,— at the fireplace where in her mind's eye she could see *him* bending to light the first fire that had ever blazed there.

For a little while she sat on the big lounge, her dreamy eyes fixed on the spot where Clive's father had stood and she remembered Jacques Renouf, too, and the lost city of Yhdunez. . . . And, somehow her memories receded still further toward earlier years; and she thought of the sunny office where Mr. Wahlbaum used to sit; and she seemed to see the curtains stirring in the wind.

After a while she rose and walked slowly along the hall to her own room.

Everything was there as she had left it; the toilet silver, evidently kept clean and bright by Michael, the little Dresden cupids on the mantel, the dainty clock, still running — further confirmation of Michael's ministrations — the fresh linen on the bed. Nothing had been changed through all these changing years. She softly opened the clothes-press door; there hung her gowns — silent witnesses of her youth, strangely and daintily grotesque in fashion. One by one she examined them, a smile edging her lips, and, in her eyes, tears.

All revery is tinged with melancholy; and it was so with her when she stood among the forgotten gowns of years ago.

It was so, too, when, one by one she unlocked and opened the drawers of dresser and bureau. From soft, ordered heaps of silk and lace and sheerest linen a faint

perfume mounted; and it was as though she subtly renewed an exquisite and secret intimacy with a youth and innocence half-forgotten in the sadder wisdom of later days.

From the still and scented twilight of a vanished year, to her own apartment perched high above the sun-smitten city she went, merely to find herself again, and look around upon what fortune had brought to her through her own endeavour.

But, somehow, the old prejudices had gone; the old instincts of pride and independence had been obliterated, merged in a serene and tranquil unity of mind and will and spirit with the man in whom every atom of her belief and faith was now centred.

It mattered no longer to her what material portion of her possessions and environment was due to her own efforts, or to his. Nothing that might be called hers could remain conceivable as hers unless he shared it. Their rights in each other included everything temporal and spiritual; everything of mind and matter alike. Of what consequence, then, might be the origin of possessions that could not exist for her unless possession were mutual?

Nothing would be real to her, nothing of value, unless so marked by his interest and his approval. And now she knew that even the world itself must become but a shadow, were he not living to make it real.

It was a fearfully hot day in town, and she waited until evening to go back to Spring Pond.

When she arrived, Mrs. Connor had a cablegram for her from Clive saying that he was sailing and would see her before the month ended.

Late into the night she looked for him in her crystal but could see nothing save a blue and tranquil sea and gulls flying, and always on the curved world's edge a far stain of smoke against the sky.

Her mother was in her room that night, seated near the window as though to keep the vigil that her daughter kept, brooding above the crystal.

It was Friday, the twenty-first, and a new moon. The starlight was magnificent in the August skies: once or twice meteors fell. But in the depths of her crystal she saw always a sunlit sea and a gull's wings flashing.

Toward morning when the world had grown its darkest and stillest, she went over to where her mother was sitting beside the window, and knelt down beside her chair.

And so in voiceless and tender communion she nestled close, her golden head resting against her mother's knees.

Dawn found her there asleep beside an empty chair.

CHAPTER XXVII

ONE day toward the end of August, Athalie, standing at the pier's end, saw the huge incoming liner slowly warping to her berth; waited amid the throngs in the vast sheds by the gangway, caught a glimpse of Clive, lost him to view, then saw him again, very near, making his way toward her. And then her hands were in his and she was looking into his beloved eyes once more.

There were a few quick words of greeting spoken, tender, low-voiced; the swift light of happiness made her blue eyes brilliant:

"You tall, sun-bronzed, lazy thing," she said; "I never told you what a distinguished looking man you are, did I? Well I'll spoil you by telling you now. No wonder everything feminine glances at you," she added as he lifted his hat to fellow passengers who were passing.

And during the customs' examination she stood beside him, amused, interested, gently bantering him when he declared everything; for even in Athalie were apparently the ineradicable seeds of that original sin — which is in all femininity — the paramount necessity for smuggling.

Once or twice he spoke aside to the customs' officer;

and Athalie instantly and gaily accused him of attempted bribery.

But when they were on their way to Spring Pond in a hired touring car with his steamer trunk and suit-cases strapped behind, he drew from his pockets the articles he had declared and paid for; and Athalie grew silent in delight as she looked down at the single and lovely strand of pearls.

All the way to Spring Pond she held them so, and her enchanted eyes reverted to them whenever she could bring herself to look anywhere except at him.

"I wondered," she said, "whether you would come to the country or whether you might think it better to remain in town."

"I shall go back to town only when you go."

"Dear, does that mean that you will stay with me at our own house?"

"If you want me."

"Oh, Clive! I was wondering — only it seemed too heavenly to hope for."

His face grew sombre for a moment. He said: "There is no other future for us. And even our comradeship will be misunderstood. But — if you are willing —"

"Is there any question in your mind as to the limit of my willingness?"

He said: "You know it will mark us for life. And if we remain guiltless, and our lives blameless, nevertheless this comradeship of ours will mark us for life."

"Do you mean, brand us?"

"Yes, dear."

"Does that cause you any real apprehension?" she laughed.

"I am thinking of you."

"Think of me, then," she said gaily, "and know that I am happy and content. The world is turning into such a wonderful friend to me; fate is becoming so gentle and so kind. Happiness may brand me; nothing else can leave a mark. So be at ease concerning me. All shall go well with me, only when with you, my darling, all goes well."

He smiled in sympathy with her gaiety of heart, but the slight shadow returned to his face again. Watching it she said:

"All things shall come to us, Clive."

"All things," he said, gravely,—"except fulfilment."

"That, too," she murmured.

"No, Athalie."

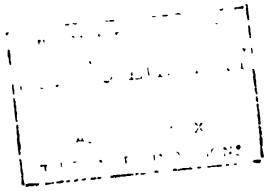
"Yes," she said under her breath.

He only lifted her ringless hand to his lips in hopeless silence; but she looked up at the cloudless sky and out over sunlit harvest fields and where grain and fruit were ripening, and she smiled, closing her white hand and pressing it gently against his lips.

Connor met them at the door and shouldered Clive's trunk and other luggage; then Athalie slipped her arm through his and took him into the autumn glow of her garden.

"Miracle after miracle, Clive — from the enchantment of July roses to the splendour of dahlia, calendula, and gladioluses. Such a wonder-house no man ever before gave to any woman. . . . There is not one stalk

"And then her hands were in his and she was looking into his beloved eyes once more."



or leaf or blossom or blade of grass that is not my intimate and tender friend, my confidant, my dear preceptor, my companion beloved and adored.

"Do you notice that the grapes on the trellis are turning dark? And the peaches are becoming so big and heavy and rosy. They will be ripe before very long."

"You must have a greenhouse," he said.

"*We* must," she admitted demurely.

He turned toward her with much of his old gaiety, laughing: "Do you know," he said, "I believe you are pretending to be in love with mè!"

"That's all it is, Clive, just pretence, and the natural depravity of a flirt. When I go back to town I'll forget you ever existed — unless you go with me."

"I'm wondering," he said, "what we had better do in town."

"I'm not wondering; I know."

He looked at her questioningly. Then she told him about her visit to Michael and the apartment.

"There is no other place in the world that I care to live in — excepting this," she said. "Couldn't we live there, Clive, when we go to town?"

After a moment he said: "Yes."

"Would you care to?" she asked wistfully. Then smiled as she met his eyes.

"So I shall give up business," she said, "and that tower apartment. There's a letter here now asking if I desire to sublet it; and as I had to renew my lease last June, that is what I shall do — if you'll let me live in the place you made for me so long ago."

He answered, smilingly, that he might be induced to permit it.

Hafiz appeared, inquisitive, urbane, waving his snowy tail; but he was shy of further demonstrations toward the man who was seated beside his beloved mistress, and he pretended that he saw something in the obscurity of the flowering thickets, and stalked it with every symptom of sincerity.

"That cat must be about six years old," said Clive, watching him.

"He plays like a kitten, still."

"Do you remember how he used to pat your thread with his paws when you were sewing."

"I remember," she said, smiling.

A little later Hafiz regained confidence in Clive and came up to rub against his legs and permit caresses.

"Such a united family," remarked Athalie, amused by the mutual demonstrations.

"How is Henry?" he asked.

"Fatter and slower than ever, dear. He suits my unenterprising disposition to perfection. Now and then he condescends to be harnessed and to carry me about the landscape. But mostly he drags the cruel burden of Connor's lawn-mower. Do you think the place looks well kept?"

"I knew you wanted to be flattered," he laughed.

"I do. Flatter me please."

"It's one of the best things I do, Athalie! For example — the lawn, the cat, and the girl are all beautifully groomed; the credit is yours; and you're a celestial dream too exquisite to be real."

"I am becoming real — as real as you are," she said with a faint smile.

"Yes," he admitted, "you and I are the only real things in the world after all. The rest — woven scenes that come and go moving across a loom."

She quoted:

"Sun and Moon illume the Room
Where the ceiling is the sky:
Night and day the Weavers ply
Colour, shadow, hue, and dye,
Where the rushing shuttles fly,
Weaving dreams across the Loom,
Picturing a common doom!

"How, Beloved, can *we* die —
We Immortals, Thou and I?"

He smiled: "Death seems very far away," he said.

"Nothing dies. . . . If only this world could understand. . . . Did I tell you that mother has been with me often while you were away?"

"No."

"It was wonderfully sweet to see her in the room. One night I fell asleep across her knees."

"Does she ever speak to you, Athalie?"

"Yes, sometimes we talk."

"At night?"

"By day, too. . . . I was sitting in the living-room the other morning, and she came up behind me and took both my hands. We talked, I lying back in the rocking chair and looking up at her. . . . Mrs. Connor came

in. I am quite sure she was frightened when she heard my voice in there conversing with nobody she could see."

Athalie smiled to herself as at some amusing memory evoked.

"If Mrs. Connor ever knew how she is followed about by so many purring pussies and little wagging dogs — I mean dogs and pussies who are no longer what we call 'alive,'— I don't know what she'd think. Sometimes the place is full of them, Clive — such darling little creatures. Hafiz sees them; and watches and watches, but never moves."

Clive was staring a trifle hard; Athalie, lazily stretching her arms, glanced at him with that humorous expression which hinted of gentlest mockery.

"Don't worry; nothing follows you, Clive, except an idle girl who finds no time for anything else, so busy are her thoughts with you."

He bent forward and kissed her; and she clasped both hands behind his head, drawing it nearer.

"Have you missed me, Athalie?"

"You could never understand how much."

"Did you find me in your crystal?"

"No; I saw only the sea and on the horizon a stain of smoke, and a gull flying."

He drew her closely into his arms: "God," he breathed, "if anything ever should happen to you! — and I — alone on earth — and blind —"

"Yes. That is the only anxiety I ever knew . . . because you are blind."

"If you came to me I could not see you. If you

spoke to me I could not hear. Could anything more awful happen?"

"Do you care for me so much?"

In his eyes she read her answer, and thrilled to it, closer in his arms; and rested so, her cheek against his, gazing at the sunset out of dreamy eyes.

They had been slowly pacing the garden paths, arm within arm, when Mrs. Connor came to summon them to dinner. The small dining-room was flooded with sunset light; rosy bars of it lay across cloth and fruit and flowers, and striped the wall and ceiling.

And when dinner was ended the pale fire still burned on the thin silk curtains and struck across the garden, gilding the coping of the wall where clustering peaches hung all turned to gold like fabled fruit that ripens in Hesperides.

Hafiz followed them out under the evening sky and seated himself upon the grass. And he seemed mildly to enjoy the robins' evening carolling, blinking benevolently up at the little vesper choristers, high singing in the sunset's lingering glow.

Whenever light puffs of wind set blossoms swaying, the jet from the fountain basin swerved, and a mellow raining sound of drops swept the still pool. The lilac twilight deepened to mauve; upon the surface of the pool a primrose tint grew duller. Then the first bat zig-zagged across the sky; and every clove-pink border became misty with the wings of dusk-moths.

On Athalie's frail white gown one alighted,— a little grey thing wearing a pair of peacock-tinted diamonds

on its forewings; and as it sat there, quivering, the iridescent incrustations changed from burnished gold to green.

"Wonders, wonders, under the moon," murmured the girl —"thronging miracles that fill the day and night, always, everywhere. And so few to see them. . . . Sometimes, to me the blindness of the world to all the loveliness that I 'see clearly' is like my own blindness to the hidden wonders of the night — where uncounted myriads of little rainbow spirits fly. And nobody sees and knows the living splendour of them except when some grey-winged phantom strays indoors from the outer shadows. And it astonishes us to see, under the drab forewings, a blaze of scarlet, gold, or orange."

"I suppose," he said, "that the unseen night world all around us is no more wonderful than what, in the day-world, the vast majority of us never see, never suspect."

"I think it must be so, Clive. Being accustomed to a more densely populated world than are many people, I believe that if I could see only what they see,— merely that small portion of activity and life which the world calls 'living things,' I should find the sunlit world rather empty, and the night but a silent desolation under the stars."

After a few minutes' thought he asked in a low voice whether at that moment there was anybody in the garden except themselves.

"Some people were here a little while ago, looking at the flowers. I think they must have lived here many, many years ago; perhaps when this old house was new."

"Could you not ask them who they were?"

"No, dear."

"Why?"

"If they were what you would call 'alive' I could not intrude upon them, could I? The laws of reticence, the respect for privacy, remain the same. I am conscious of no more impertinent curiosity concerning them than I am concerning any passer in the city streets."

"Have they gone?"

"Yes. But all the evening I have been hearing children at play just beyond the garden wall. . . . And, when I was a child, somebody killed a little dog down by the causeway. He is here in the garden, now, trotting gaily about the lawn — such a happy little dog! — and Hafiz has folded his forepaws under his ruff and has settled down to watch him. Don't you see how Hafiz watches, how his head turns following every movement of the little visitor?"

He nodded; then: "Do you still hear the children outside the wall?"

She sat listening, the smile brooding in her eyes.

"Can you still hear them?" he repeated, wistfully.

"Yes, dear."

"What are they saying?"

"I can't make out. They are having a happy time somewhere on the outer lawns."

"How many are there?"

"Oh, I don't know. Their voices make a sweet, confused sound like bird music before dawn. I couldn't even guess how many children are playing there."

"Are any among them those children you once saw here? — the children who pleaded with you —"

She did not answer. He tightened his arm around her waist, drawing her nearer; and she laid her cheek against his shoulder.

"Yes," she said, "they are there."

"You know their voices?"

"Yes, dearest."

"Will they come again into the garden?"

Her face flushed deeply:

"Not unless we call them."

"Call them," he said. And, after a silence: "Dearest, will you not call them to us?"

"Oh, Clive! I have been calling. Now it remains with you."

"I did not hear you call them."

"*They* heard."

"Will they come?"

"I — think so."

"When?"

"Very soon — if you truly desire them," she whispered against his shoulder.

Somewhere within the house the hour struck. After a long while they rose, moving slowly, her head still lying on his shoulder. Hafiz watched them until the door closed, then settled down again to gaze on things invisible to men.

Hours of the night in dim processional passed the old house unlighted save by the stars. Toward dawn a sea-wind stirred the trees; the fountain jet rained on

the surface of the pool or, caught by a sudden breeze, drifted in whispering spray across the grass. Everywhere the darkness grew murmurous with sounds, vague as wind-blown voices; sweet as the call of children from some hill-top where the stars are very near, and the new moon's sickle flashes through the grass.

Athalie stirred where she lay, turned her head sideways with infinite precaution, and lay listening.

Through the open window beside her she saw a dark sky set with stars; heard the sea-wind in the leaves and the falling water of the fountain. And very far away a sweet confused murmuring grew upon her ears.

Silently her soul answered the far hail; her heart, responding, echoed a voiceless welcome till she became fearful lest it beat too loudly.

Then, with infinite precaution, noiselessly, and scarcely stirring, she turned and laid her lips again where they had rested all night long and, lying so, dreamed of miracles ineffable.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CLIVE'S enforced idleness had secretly humiliated him and made him restless. Athalie in her tender wisdom understood how it was with him before he did himself, and she was already deftly guiding his balked energy into a brand new channel, the same being a bucolic one.

At first he had demurred, alleging total ignorance of husbandry; and, seated on the sill of an open window and looking down at him in the garden, she tormented him to her heart's content:

"Ignorant of husbandry!" she mimicked,—"when any husband I ever heard of could go to school to you and learn what a real husband ought to be! Why *will* you pretend to be so painfully modest, Clive, when you are really secretly pleased with yourself and entirely convinced that, in you, the world might discover a living pattern of model domesticity!"

"I'm glad you think so —"

"*Think!* If I were only as certain of anything else! Never had I dreamed that any man could become so cowed, so spiritless, so perfectly house and yard broken —"

"If I come upstairs," he said, "I'll settle *you!*"

Leaning from the window overlooking the garden she

lazily defied him; turned up her dainty nose at him; mocked at him until he flung aside the morning paper and rose, bent on her punishment.

"Oh, Clive, don't!" she pleaded, leaning low from the sill. "I won't tease you any more,—and this gown is fresh—"

"I'll come up and freshen it!" he threatened.

"Please don't rumple me. I'll come down if you like. Shall I?"

"All right, darling," he said, resuming his newspaper and cigarette.

She came, seated herself demurely beside him, twitched his newspaper until he cast an ominous glance at his tormentor.

"Dear," she said, "I simply can't let you alone; you are so bland and self-satisfied—"

"Athalie—if you persist in tormenting me—"

"I torment you? *I?* An humble accessory in the scenery set for you? I?—a stage property fashioned merely for the hero of the drama to sit upon—"

"All right! I'll do that now!—"

But she nestled close to him, warding off wrath with both arms clasping his, and looking up at him out of winning eyes in which but a tormenting glint remained.

"You wouldn't rumple this very beautiful and brand new gown, would you, darling? It was so frightfully expensive—"

"I don't care—"

"Oh, but you must care. You must become thrifty and shrewd and devious and close, or you'll never make a successful farmer—"

where over their land lay the dun-coloured velvet squares of freshly ploughed fields awaiting unfragrant fertilizer and the autumn rains.

The rains came heavily toward the end of October; and November was grey and wet and rather warm. But open fires became necessary in the house, and now they regularly reddened the twilight in library and living-room when the early November dusk brought Athalie and Clive indoors.

Hither they came, the fire-lit hearth their trysting place after they had exchanged their rain-drenched clothes for something dry; and there they curled up on the wide sofas and watched the swift darkness fall, and the walls and ceiling redden.

It was an hour which Athalie had once read of as the "Children's Hour" and now she understood better its charming significance. And she kept it religiously, permitting herself to do nothing, and making Clive defer anything he had to do, until after dinner. Then he might read his paper or book, and she could take up her sewing if she chose, or study, or play, or write the few letters that she cared to write.

Clive wrote no more, now. In this first year together they desired each other only, indifferent to all else outside.

It was to her the magic year of fulfilment; to him an enchanted interlude wherein only the girl beside him mattered.

Athalie sewed a great deal on odd, delicate, sheer materials where narrowness and length ruled proportions, and where there seemed to be required much lace and

many little ribbons. Also she hummed to herself as she sewed, singing under her breath endless airs which had slipped into her head she scarce knew when or how.

An odd and fragrant freshness seemed to cling to her making her almost absurdly youthful, as though she had suddenly dropped back to her girlhood. Clive noticed it.

"You look about sixteen," he said.

"My heart is younger, dear."

"How young?"

"You know when it was born, don't you? Very well, it is as many days old as I have been in love with you. Before that it was a muscle capable merely of sturdy friendship."

One day a packet came from New York for her. It contained two rings, one magnificent, the other a plain circlet. She kissed him rather shyly, wore both that evening, but not again.

"I am not ashamed," she explained serenely. "Folkways are now a matter of indifference to me. Civilisation must offer me a better argument than it has offered hitherto before I resign to it my right in you, or deny your right to me."

He knew that civilisation would lock them out and remain unconcerned as to what became of them. Doubtless she knew it too, as she sat there sewing on the frail garment which lay across her knee and singing blithely under her breath some air with cadence like a berceuse.

During the "Children's Hour" she sat beside him, always quiet; or if stirred from her revery to a brief

exchange of low-voiced words, she soon relapsed once more into that happy, brooding silence by the firelight.

Then came dinner, and the awakened gaiety of unquenched spirits; then the blessed evening hours with him.

But the last hour of these she called *her* hour; and always laid aside her book or sewing, and slipped from the couch to the floor at his feet, laying her head against his knees.

Snow came in December; and Christmas followed. They kept the mystic festival alone together; and Athalie had a tiny tree lighted in the room between hers and Clive's, and hung it with toys and picture books.

It was very pretty in its tinsel and tinted globes; and its faint light glimmered on the walls and dainty furniture of the dim pink room.

Afterward Athalie laid away tinsel and toy, wrapping all safely in tissue, as though to be kept secure and fresh for another Christmas — the most wonderful that any girl could dream of. And perhaps it was to be even more wonderful than Athalie had dreamed.

December turned very cold. The ice thickened; and she skated with Clive on Spring Pond. The ice also remained through January and February that winter; but after December had ended Athalie skated no more.

Clive, unknown to her, had sent for a Shaker cloak and hood of scarlet; and when it arrived Athalie threw back her lovely head and laughed till the tears dimmed her eyes.

"All the same," he said, "you don't look much older in it than you looked in your red hood and cloak the first day I ever set eyes on you."

"You poor darling! — as though even you could push back the hands of Time! It's the funniest and sweetest thing you ever did — to send for this red hooded cloak."

However she wore it whenever she ventured out with him on foot or in the sleigh which he had bought. Once, coming home, she was still wearing it when Mrs. Connor brought to them two peach turnovers.

A fire had been lighted in the ancient stove; and they went out to the sun-parlour,— once the bar — and sat in the same old arm-chairs exactly as they had been seated that night so long ago; and there they ate their peach turnovers, their enchanted eyes meeting, striving to realise it all, and the intricate ways of Destiny and Chance and Fate.

February was a month of heavy snows that year; great drifts buried the fences and remained until well into March. April was April,— and very much so; but they saw the blue waters of the bay sometimes; and dogwood and willow stems were already aglow with colour; and a premature blue-bird sang near Athalie's garden. Crocuses appeared everywhere with grape hyacinths and snow-drops. Then jonquil and narcissus opened in all their loveliness, and soft winds stirred the waters of the fountain.

May found the garden uncovered, with tender amber-tinted shoots and exquisite fronds of green wherever

the lifted mulch disclosed the earth. Also peonies were up and larkspur, and the ambitious promise of the hollyhocks delighted Athalie.

Pink peach buds bloomed; cherry, pear, and apple covered the trees with rosy snow; birds sang everywhere; and the waters of the pool mirrored a sky of purest blue. But Athalie now walked no further than the garden seat,— and walked slowly, leaning always on Clive's arm.

In those days throughout May her mother was with her in her room almost every night. But Athalie did not speak of this to Clive.

CHAPTER XXIX

SPRING ploughing had been proceeding for some time now, but Athalie did not feel equal to walking cross-lots over ploughed ground, so she let Clive go alone on tours of inspection.

But these absences were brief; he did not care to remain away from Athalie for more than an hour at a time. So, T. Phelan ploughed on, practically unmolested and untormented by questions, suggestions, and advice. Which liberty was to his liking. And he loafed much.

In these latter days of May Athalie spent a great deal of her time among her cushions and wraps on the garden seat near the fountain. On his return from prowling about the farm Clive was sure to find her there, reading or sewing, or curled up among her cushions in the sun with Hafiz purring on her lap.

And she would look up at Clive out of sleepy, humorous eyes in which glimmered a smile of greeting, or she would pretend surprise and disapproval at his long absence of half an hour with: "Well, C. Bailey, Junior! Where do *you* come from now?"

The phases of awakening spring in the garden seemed to be an endless source of pleasure to the girl; she would sit for hours looking at the pale lilac-tinted wistaria clusters hanging over the naked wall and

watching plundering bumble-bees scrambling from blossom to blossom.

And when at the base of the wall, the spiked buds of silvery-grey iris unfolded, and their delicate fragrance filled the air, the exquisite mingling of the two odours and the two shades of mauve thrilled her as no perfume, no colour had ever affected her.

The little colonies of lily-of-the-valley came into delicate bloom under the fringing shrubbery; golden bell flower, pink and vermilion cydonia, roses, all bloomed and had their day; lilac bushes were weighted with their heavy, dewy clusters; the sweet-brier's green tracery grew into tender leaf and its matchless perfume became apparent when the sun fell hot.

In the warm air there seemed to brood the exquisite hesitation of happy suspense,— a delicious and breathless sense of waiting for something still more wonderful to come.

And when Athalie felt it stealing over her she looked at Clive and knew that he also felt it. Then her slim hand would steal into his and nestle there, content, fearless, blissfully confident of what was to be.

But it was subtly otherwise with Clive. Once or twice she felt his hand tremble slightly as though a slight shiver had passed over him; and when again she noticed it she asked him why.

"Nothing," he said in a strained voice; "I am very, very happy."

"I know it. . . . There is no fear mingling with your happiness; is there, Clive?"

But before he replied she knew that it was so.

"Dearest," she murmured, "dearest! You must not be afraid for me."

And suddenly the long pent fears strangled him; he could not speak; and she felt his lips, hot and tremulous against her hand.

"My heart!" she whispered, "all will go well. There is absolutely no reason for you to be afraid."

"Do you *know* it?"

"Yes, I *know* it. I am certain of it, darling. Everything will turn out as it should. . . . I can't bear to have the most beautiful moments of our lives made sad for you by apprehension. Won't you believe me that all will go well?"

"Yes."

"Then smile at me, Clive."

His under lip was still unsteady as he drew nearer and took her into his arms.

"God wouldn't do such harm," he said. "He *couldn't!* All must go well,"

She smiled gaily and framed his head with her hands:

"You're just a boy, aren't you, C. Bailey, Junior? — just a big boy, yet. As though the God we understand — you and I — could deal otherwise than tenderly with us. *He* knows how rare love really is. He will not disturb it. The world needs it for seed."

The smile gradually faded from Clive's face; he shook his head, slightly:

"If I had known — if I had understood —"

"What, darling?"

"The hazard — the chances you are to take —"

But she laughed deliciously, and sealed his mouth

with her fragrant hand, bidding him hunt for other sources of worry if he really was bent on scaring himself.

Later she asked him for a calendar, and he brought it, and together they looked over it where several of the last days of May had been marked with a pencil.

As she sat beside him, studying the printed sequence of the days, a smile hovering on her lips, he thought he had never seen her so beautiful.

A soft wind blew the bright tendrils of her hair across her cheeks; her skin was like a little girl's, rose and snow, smooth as a child's; her eyes clearly, darkly blue — the hue and tint called azure — like the colour of the zenith on some still June day.

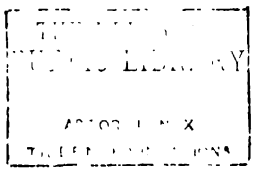
And through the glow of her superb and youthful symmetry, ever, it seemed to him, some inward radiance pulsated, burning in her golden burnished hair, in scarlet on her lips, making lovely the soft splendour of her eyes. Hers was the fresh, sweet beauty of ardent youth and spring incarnate,— neither frail and colourlessly spiritual, nor tainted with the stain of clay.

Sometimes Athalie lunched there in the garden with him, Hafiz, seated on the bench beside them, politely observant, condescending to receive a morsel now and then.

It was on such a day, at noon-tide, that Athalie bent over toward him, touched his hair with her lips, then whispered something very low.

His face went white, but he smiled and rose,— came

"Sometimes Athalie lunched there in the garden with him."



back swiftly to kiss her hands — then entered the house and telephoned to New York.

When he came back to her she was ready to rise, lean on his arm, and walk leisurely to the house.

On the way she called his attention to a pale blue sheet of forget-me-nots spreading under the shrubbery. She noticed other new blossoms in the garden, lingered before the bed of white pansies. "Like little faces," she said with a faint smile.

One silvery-grey iris he broke from its sheathed stem and gave her; she moved slowly on with the scented blossom lifted to her lips.

In the hall a starched and immaculate nurse met her with a significant nod of understanding. And so, between Clive and the trained nurse she mounted the stairs to her room.

Later Clive came in to sit beside her where she lay on her dainty bed. She turned her flushed face on the pillow, smiled at him, and lifted her neck a little; and he slipped one arm under it.

"Such a wonderful pillow your shoulder makes," she murmured. . . . "I am thinking of the first time I ever knew it . . . So quiet I lay,— such infinite caution I used whenever I moved. . . . That night the air was musical with children's voices — everywhere under the stars — softly garrulous, laughing, lisping, calling from the hills and meadows. . . . That night of miracles and of stars — my dear — my dearest! —"

Close to her cheek he breathed: "Are you in pain?"

"Oh, Clive! I am so happy. I love you so — I love you so."

Then nurse and physician came in and the latter took him by the arm and walked out of the room with him. For a long while they paced the passage-way together in whispered conversation before the nurse came to the door and nodded.

Both went in: Athalie laughed and put up her arms as Clive bent over her.

"All will be well," she whispered, kissed him, then turned her head sharply to the right.

When he found himself in the garden, walking at random, the sun hung a hand's breadth over the woods. Later it seemed to become entangled amid new leaves and half-naked branches, hanging there motionless, blinding, glittering through an eternity of time.

And yet he did not notice when twilight came, nor when the dusk's purple turned to night until he saw lights turned up on both floors.

Nobody summoned him to dinner but he did not notice that. Connor came to him there in the darkness and said that two other physicians had arrived with another nurse. He went into the library where they were just leaving to mount the stairs. They looked at him as they passed but merely bowed and said nothing.

A steady, persistent clangour vibrated in his brain, dulling it, so that senses like sight and hearing seemed slow as though drugged.

Suddenly like a sword the most terrible fear he ever knew passed through him. . . . And after a while the

dull, ringing clangour came back, dinning, stupefying, interminable. Yet he was conscious of every sound, every movement on the floor above.

One of the physicians came half-way down the stairs, looked at him; and he rose mechanically and went up.

He saw nothing clearly in the room until he bent over Athalie.

Her eyes unclosed. She whispered: "It is all right, beloved."

Somebody led him out. He kept on, conscious of the grasp on his arm, but seeing nothing.

He had been walking for a long while, somewhere between light and darkness,—perhaps for hours, perhaps minutes. Then somebody came who laid an arm about his shoulder and spoke of courage.

Other people were in the room, now. One said:

"Don't go up yet." . . . Once he noticed a woman, Mrs. Connor, crying. Connor led her away.

Others moved about or stood silent; and some one was always drawing near him, speaking of courage. It was odd that so much darkness should invade a lighted room.

Then somebody came down the stairs, noiselessly. The house was very still.

And at last they let him go upstairs.

CHAPTER XXX

LIGHTS yet burned on the lower floors and behind the drawn blinds of Athalie's room. The night was quiet and soft and lovely; the moon still young in its first quarter.

There was no wind to blow the fountain jet, so that every drop fell straight back where the slim column of water broke against a strip of stars above the garden wall. Somewhere in distant darkness the little owl trilled.

If he were walking or motionless he no longer knew it; nor did he seem to be aware of anything around.

Hafiz came up to him through the dusk with a little mew of recognition or of loneliness. Afterward the cat followed him for a while and then settled down upon the grass intent on the invisible stirring stealthily in obscurity.

The fragrance of the iris grew sweeter, fresher. Many new buds had unfolded since high noon. One stalk had fallen across the path and Clive's dragging feet passed over it where he moved blindly, at hazard, with stumbling steps along the path — errant, senseless, and always blind.

For on the garden bench a young girl sat, slender, exquisite, smiling as he approached. But he could not

see her, nor could he see in her arms the little flower-like face, and the tiny hands against her breast.

"Clive!" she said. But he could not hear her.

"Clive," she whispered; "my beloved!"

But he could neither see nor hear. His knees, too, were failing; he put out one hand, blindly, and sank down upon the garden bench.

All night long she sat beside him, her head against his shoulder, sometimes touching his drawn face with warm, sweet lips, sometimes looking down at the little face pressed to her quiet breast.

And all night long the light burned behind the closed blinds of her room; and the little silvery dusk-moths floated in and out of the rays. And Hafiz, sitting on the grass, watched them sometimes; sometimes he gazed at his young mistress out of wide, unblinking eyes.

"Hafiz," she murmured lazily in her sweetly humorous way.

The cat uttered a soft little mew but did not move. And when she laid her cheek close to Clive's whispering,—"I love you—I love you so!"—he never stirred.

Her blue eyes, brooding, grew patient, calm, and tender; she looked down silently into the little face close cradled in her arms.

Then the child's eyes opened like two blue stars; and she bent over in a swift ecstasy of bliss, covering the flower-like face with kisses.

THE END

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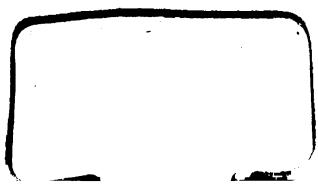
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